THE PARSON O'DUMFORD

BY G. MANVILLE FENN

CASSELL, PETTER, GALPIN & CO., LONDON, PARIS & NEW YORK

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THE PARSON O' DUMFORD.

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PARSON O' DUMFORD:

A Story of Lincoln Folk.

BY

G. MANVILLE FENN.

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THE PARSON O' DUMFORD.

CHAPTER I.

PLEASANT RECEPTIONS.

"Ax."

"I was asking, or axing, as you call it, my man. I said: is that Dumford, down there in the valley?"

"And I said ax, or arks, as you call it, my man," was the surly, defiant reply.

The last speaker looked up savagely from the block of stone on which he was seated, and the questioner looked down from where he stood on the rough track. There was a quiet, half-amused twinkle in his clear grey eyes, which did not quit his verbal opponent for an instant, as he remained gazing at him without speaking.

They were men of about the same age—eight-and-twenty or thirty—the one evidently a clergyman by his white tie, and the clerical cut of his clothes, though there was an easy *dégagé* look in the soft felt hat cocked a little on one side of his massive head—a head that seemed naturally to demand short crisp curly brown hair. The same free-and-easy air showed in the voluminous wrinkles of his grey tweed trousers, his thick square-toed rather dusty boots, and his gloveless hands, which were brown, thickly-veined, and muscular. He had a small leather bag in one hand, a stout stick in the other, and it was evident that he had walked some distance over the hills, for the nearest town, in the direction he had come, was at least six miles away.

The seated man, who was smoking a very dirty and short clay pipe, was as broad-shouldered, as sturdy, and as well-knit; but while the one, in spite of a somewhat heavy build, was, so to speak, polished by exercise into grace; the other was rough and angular, and smirched as

his countenance was by sweat and the grime of some manufacturing trade, he looked as brutal as his words.

"What are yow lookin' at?" he suddenly growled, menacingly.

"At yow," said the clergyman, in the most unruffled way; and, letting his bag and stick fall in the ferns, he coolly seated himself on a second block of stone on the bright hill-side.

"Now look here," exclaimed the workman, roughly, "I know what you're after. You're going to call me my friend, and finish off with giving me a track, and you may just save yerself the trouble, for it wean't do."

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe as he spoke, and looked menacing enough to do any amount of mischief to a man he did not like.

"You're wrong," said the traveller, coolly, as he rummaged in the pocket of his long black coat. "I'm going to have a pipe."

He opened a case, took out a well-blackened meerschaum, scraped the ashes from its interior, filled it from a large india-rubber pouch which he then passed to the workman, before striking a match from a little brass box and beginning to smoke, with his hands clasped round his knees.

"Try that tobacco," he continued. "You'll like it."

The workman took the tobacco-pouch in an ill-used way, stared at it, stared at the stranger smoking so contentedly by him, frowned, muttered something uncommonly like an oath, and ended by beginning to fill his pipe.

"Don't swear," said the traveller, taking his pipe from his lips for a moment, but only to replace it, and puff away like a practised smoker.

"Shall if I like," said the other, savagely. "What have yow got to do wi' it?"

"Don't," said the traveller; "what's the good? It's weak and stupid. If you don't like a man, hit him. Don't swear."

The workman stared as these strange doctrines were enunciated; then, after a moment's hesitation, he finished filling his pipe, struck a match which refused to light, threw it down impatiently, tried another, and another,

and another, with the same result, and then uttered a savage oath.

"At it again," said the traveller, coolly, thrusting a hand into his pocket. "Why, what a dirty-mouthed fellow you are."

"Yow wean't be happy till I've made your mouth dirty," said the workman, savagely; "and you're going the gainest way to get it."

"Nonsense!" said the traveller, coolly. "Why didn't you ask me for a light?"

He handed his box of vesuvians, and it was taken in a snatchy way. One was lighted, and the few puffs of smoke which followed seemed to have a mollifying effect on the smoker, who confined himself to knitting his brows and staring hard at the stranger, who now took off his hat to let the fresh soft breeze blow over his hot forehead, while he gazed down at the little town, with its square-towered church nestling amidst a clump of elms, beyond which showed a great blank, many-windowed building, with tall chimney shafts, two or three of which were vomiting clouds of black smoke nowise to the advantage of the landscape.

"I thowt you was a parson," said the young workman at last, in a growl a trifle less surly.

"Eh?" said the other, starting from a reverie, "parson? Yes, to be sure I am."

"Methody?"

"No."

"Ranter, p'r'aps?"

"Oh no, only when I get a little warm."

"What are you, then?"

"Well, first of all," said the traveller, quietly, "you'd better answer my question. Is that Dumford?"

The workman hesitated and frowned. It seemed like giving in—being defeated—to answer now, but the clear grey eyes were fixed upon him in a way that seemed to influence his very being, and he said at last, gruffly:—

"Well, yes, it is Doomford; and what if it is?"

"Oh, only that I'm the new vicar."

The workman puffed rapidly at his pipe, his face assuming a look of dislike, and at last he ejaculated:—

"Ho!"

"Like that tobacco?" said the new vicar, quietly.

There was a pause, during which the workman seemed to be debating within himself whether he should answer or not. At last he condescended to reply:—

"'Tain't bad."

"No! it's really good. I always get the best."

The last speaker took in at a glance what was going on in his companion's breast, and that was a fight between independent defiance and curiosity, but he seemed not to notice it.

"Give him time," he said to himself; and he smoked on, amused at the fellow's rough independence. He had been told that he would find Dumford a strange place, with a rough set of people; but nothing daunted, he had accepted the living, and he had made up his mind how to act. At last the workman spoke:—

"I never see a parson smoke afore!"

"Didn't you? Oh, I like a pipe."

"Ain't it wicked?" said the other, with a grin.

"Wicked? Why should it be? I see nothing wrong in it, or I should not do it."

There was another pause, during which pipes were refilled and lighted once more.

"Ever drink beer?" said the workman at last.

"Beer? By Samson!" exclaimed the new vicar, "how I should like a good draught now, my man. I'm very thirsty."

"Then there ain't none nigher than the Bull, an' that's two mile away. There's plenty o' watter."

"Where?"

"Round the corner in the beck."

A short nod accompanied this, and the vicar rose.

"Then we'll have a drop of water—qualified," he said, taking a flask from his pocket. "Scotch whisky," he added, as he saw the stare directed at the little flask, whose top he was unscrewing.

A dozen paces down the path, hidden by some rocks, ran the source of a tiny rivulet or beck, with water like crystal, and filling the cup he took from his flask, the vicar qualified it with whisky, handed it to his rough

companion, and then drank a draught himself with a sigh of relief.

"I've walked across the hills from Churley," he said, as they re-seated themselves. "I wanted to see what the country was like."

"Ho!" said the workman. "Say, you ain't like the owd parson."

"I suppose not. Did you know him?"

"Know him? Not I. He warn't our sort."

"You used to go and hear him, I suppose?"

"Go and hear him? Well, that's a good one," said the workman; and a laugh transformed his face, driving away the sour, puckered look, which, however, began rapidly to return.

"What's the matter?" said the vicar, after a few minutes' silent smoking.

"Matter? matter wi' who?"

"Why, with you. What have you come up here for, all by yourself?"

"Nothing," was the reply, in the surliest of voices.

"Nonsense, man! Do you think I can't tell that you're put out—hipped—and that something has annoyed you?"

The young man's face gave a twitch or two, and he shuffled half round in his seat. Then, leaping up, he began to hurry off.

The new vicar had caught him in a dozen strides, putting away his pipe as he walked.

"There," he said, "I won't ask you any more questions about yourself. I'm going down into the town, and we may as well walk together."

The young workman turned round to face him, angrily, but the calm, unruffled look of his superior disarmed him, and he gave a bit of a gulp and walked on.

"I never quarrel with a man for being cross when he has had something to put him out," said the vicar, quietly. Then seeing that he was touching dangerous ground, he added, "By the way, where's the vicarage?"

"That's it, next the church," was the reply.

"Yes, I see; and what's that big building with the smoking chimneys?"

"Foundry," was said gruffly.

"To be sure, yes. Bell-foundry, isn't it?"

"Yes." Then after a pause, "I work theer."

"Indeed?"

"Tell you what," said the young man, growing sociable in spite of himself; "yow get leave and I'll show you all about the works. No I wean't, though," he exclaimed, abruptly. "Cuss the works, I'll never go there no more."

The new vicar looked at him, tightening his lips a little.

"Another sore place, eh?" he said to himself, and turned the conversation once more.

"What sort of people are you at Dumford, my lad?"

"Hey? what sort o' people? Why, men and women and bairns, of course. What did you expect they weer?"

"I mean as to conduct," said the vicar, laughing. "What will they say to me, for instance?"

The young man's face grew less cloudy for a few moments, a broad, hearty, honest grin extending it so that he looked a frank, even handsome young fellow.

"They'll make it a bit warm for you, parson," he said at last.

"Eh? will they?" said the vicar, smiling. "Rough as you were, eh?"

"Oh no," said the other, quickly. "Don't you take no notice o' that. I ain't always that how. I was a bit popped this morning."

"Yes, I could see you were a bit *popped*," said the vicar. "We all have our troubles, my lad; but it's your true man that gets the strong hand of his anger and masters it."

"You look as if you never had nought to make you waxy in your life," said the workman. "I say, what do they call you?"

"Call me? A parson, I suppose."

"No; I mean call you. What's your name?"

"Oh! Selwood—Murray Selwood."

"Murray Selwood," said the questioner, repeating it

to himself. "It's a curus sort o' name. Why didn't they call you Tom, or Harry, or Sam when thou wast a bairn?"

"Can't say," said the vicar, smiling. "I was too young to have a voice in the matter."

"You couldn't help it, of course. Say, can yow play cricket?"

"Oh yes."

"Bowl a bit, I suppose?"

"Yes; I'm best with the ball."

"Round hand?"

"Yes, and pretty sharp."

"Give's yer hand, parson, I like yow, hang me if I don't; and I'll come and hear you fust Sunday as you preaches."

The two men joined hands, and the grasp was long, earnest, and friendly, for the Reverend Murray Selwood, coming down freshly to his new living amongst people who had been described to him as little better than savages, felt that he had won one rough heart to his side, and was gladdened by the frank open gaze that met his own.

It was a different man that walked on now by his side, talking freely, in the rough independent way of the natives of his part; people who never thought of saying *Sir*, or touching their hat to any man—save and excepting the tradespeople, who contrived a salute to the wealthier families or clergy of the neighbourhood. He laughed as he talked of the peculiarities of Jacky this or Sammy that, and was in the midst of a speech about how parson would find "some of 'em rough 'uns to deal wi'," when he stopped short, set his teeth, drew in a long breath, and was in an instant an altered man.

The Reverend Murray Selwood saw and interpreted the change in a moment.

"Oh, 'tis love, 'tis love, 'tis love that makes the world go round," he said to himself; and he looked curiously at the little group upon which they had suddenly come on turning round by a group of weather-beaten, grey-lichened rocks.

There were two girls, one of whom was more than

ankle-deep in a soft patch of bog, while the other was trying very hard to reach her and relieve her from her unpleasant predicament.

Danger there was none: a good wetting from the amber-hued bog water being all that need be feared; but as the corner by the rocks was turned it was evident that the spongy bog was now rapidly giving way, and if help were to be afforded it must be at once.

The young workman hesitated for a moment, and then half turned away his head, but the vicar ran forward as the maiden in distress cried sharply—

"Oh Daisy, Daisy, what shall I do?"

"Let me help you out," said the vicar, smiling. "Why, it is soft here," he cried, as he went in over his knees, but got one foot on a tuft of dry heath and dragged out the other, to plant it upon a patch of grass. "Don't be alarmed. There, both hands on my shoulder. That's right. Hold tight, I've got you. Why, you were sinking fast, and planting yourself as a new kind of marsh flower—and—there, don't shrink away, or we shall be both planted—to blossom side by side. It *is* soft—that's better—now lean all your weight on me, my dear—not that you're heavy—now I have you—steady it is—that's better."

As he kept up this running fire of disconnected words, he contrived to drag the girl out of the soft bog, placing his arm well round her waist, and then carried her in his arms, stepping cautiously from tussock to tussock till he placed her, blushing and trembling, beside her companion, who had retreated to the firm ground.

"Oh, thank you. I am so much obliged," stammered the girl, as her long lashes were lowered over her pretty hazel eyes, which shrank from the honest admiring gaze directed upon them.

And truly there was something to admire in the pretty, innocent, girlish face with its creamy complexion, and wavy dark brown hair, several little tresses of which had been blown loose by the breeze on the hill-side.

She was very plainly dressed, and wore a simple coarse straw hat, but there was an air of refinement about her which, before she opened her lips, told the new vicar that

he was in the presence of one who had been born in a sphere of some culture.

Not so her companion, who, though as well favoured by nature, was cast in quite another mould. Plump, peachy, and rounded of outline, she was a thorough specimen of the better class English cottage girl, spoiled by her parents, and imbued with a knowledge that she was the pretty girl of the place.

"I am so much obliged—it was so good of you," stammered the heroine of the bog.

"Not at all, my dear; don't mention it," said the vicar, in a quiet way that helped to put the discomfited maiden at her ease. "I see: gathering bog-flowers and went too far. For shame," he continued, loudly. "You, a country young lady, and not to know it was dangerous to go where the cotton rushes grow. You wanted some, eh? Yes, and left the basket out there—half full."

"Oh, pray don't go—never mind the basket—it does not matter," faltered the girl; but the vicar was already stepping from tussock to tussock, ending by hooking up the basket with his stick, and pausing to pick some of the best silky topped rushes within his reach.

"There," he said, returning the basket and its contents; "there are your cotton rushes—earth's fruit. I ought to scold you for behaving like a daughter of Eve, and trying to get what you ought not to touch."

The girl crimsoned to the roots of her hair at the word Eve, and exchanged glances with her companion, who was standing before her, looking hot, frowning, and cross, with her eyes fixed on the ground, and her nose in the air, as if being scourged by the angry look directed at her by the young workman, who stood a few yards off scowling, with his hands thrust into the very bottoms of his pockets.

"I did not think the bog was so treacherous," said the girl, stealing a look at the frank manly face before her. "It looked so safe."

"So do many things in this world, my dear; but you must not trust them any the more for their fair seeming."

The girl started a little, and looked indignant at the familiar way in which she was addressed by so young a

man—a perfect stranger. She had already tried to sting him in the bog with two or three furious darts from her bright eyes for daring to put his arms round her. In fact she had felt for a moment that she would rather sink into the earth than be touched like that, but she was helpless and had to resign herself to her fate.

"Ah!" said the vicar, "you are looking angry at me for speaking in such a free way!"

"I—I indeed—I——"

"Ah, my dear, I can read that pretty innocent face of yours like a book. There—there—don't blush so. We are strangers; well, let's be strangers no more. Let me introduce myself. I am Murray Selwood, your new parson, and you are——?"

"Eve Pelly—Mrs. Glaire's——"

"Niece. I know, my dear. Very, very glad to make your acquaintance. You see I know something about the place, though I have not been there yet."

As he spoke he took the timidly extended hand, and gave it a warm frank pressure, which again heightened the blush; but in a few moments Eve Pelly felt more at her ease in the presence of this stranger, who, with all his freedom, had an atmosphere of gentlemanly truth and candour, which won upon all with whom he came in contact.

"Now," he said, "you must introduce me to my other little friend here. Who is this?"

"This is Daisy Banks, Mr. Selwood. Mr. Banks is my aunt's foreman at the Foundry. Daisy comes with me sometimes when I go for a walk. We have known each other from children."

"To be sure," said the vicar, smiling. "I might have known your name was Daisy. Shake hands, my dear. You'll never change that name, but some day you'll be coming to me to change the other for you."

"Which I'm sure I never shall," cried Daisy, with an indignant stamp, and a hot angry glance at the young workman, who ground his teeth, and savagely kicked the top off a tuft of heather.

"Don't be angry, my dear," said the vicar, kindly, as, red-faced, choking, and hardly able to restrain her angry

tears, the girl snatched away her hand and turned away.

"It's one of my weaknesses to touch tender chords unwittingly," he said in a low tone to Eve; and, how it was she knew not, the girl felt herself drawn into a feeling of confidence with this stranger, who, however, half affronted her susceptibilities the next moment by saying,

"But come, you must not stand here with wet feet. If you were a sister of mine I should make you take off those dripping boots."

"They are not wet—not very wet," she stammered, correcting herself.

"I think I know," said the vicar, smiling. "But come, you must walk home sharply. I'm a bit of a doctor in my way. You won't mind my company, I hope. We must be very good friends."

"I'm sure we shall," said Eve, frankly, as she glanced once more at her companion, and the next minute he was chatting to her about the contents of her basket.

"Then you understand botany?" she said, eagerly; and he looked down with pleasure at the bright, animated countenance at his side.

"Oh yes, a little. And you do, I see."

"Oh, a very little," said Eve; "the hard Latin words are so puzzling."

"But you can learn plenty of botany without troubling yourself over the long names; they will come to you imperceptibly."

Meanwhile Daisy, who had been forgotten, had followed on a few yards behind, looking very angry and indignant at the way in which she was neglected, while the young workman walking by her side seemed as angry, but with a dash of the savage in his face.

Both looked straight before them, and neither spoke, each going on as if in utter ignorance of the companion's presence.

"I shall have to give you some lessons when I begin making my collection of specimens," said the vicar, after a few more observations.

"Will you?" exclaimed Eve, eagerly; and then, recalling the fact that she had known this stranger but a

few minutes, she tried to qualify her remark, failed dismally, and began to feel exceedingly hot and conscious, when there was a diversion.

They had been gradually nearing the town, and had reached a spot where the moorland gave place to cultivated soil, when a young man, dressed in a rather fast style, and with a cigar in his mouth, suddenly leaped over a stile, and started and looked quite awkward on finding himself face to face with this group.

He was a slight fair young fellow, of some four-and-twenty, with rather pale downy whiskers, and a blonde, silky moustache, which was carefully waxed into points. His dress was a light tweed suit, but to condone for the sombre hue of it and his grey deerstalker hat, he wore a brilliant scarlet tie slipped through a massive gold ring, and wore several rings on his thin effeminate fingers.

The effect upon the party caused by the sudden appearance of this personage was varied.

Daisy, who had resumed the natural tint of her complexion—a peachy hue, touched rather warmly by the brown of the sun—became as though the new-comer's tie was reflected to her very temples; the young workman's face grew black as night, and his teeth grated together as his pockets suddenly bulged out, indicative of doubled fist, and he stared at the dandy in a menacing way that betokened evil.

As for Eve, she ran forward with a little joyous cry, and took the young man's arm.

"Ah, Dick," she cried, "I didn't expect you. How kind of you to come."

"Didn't come to meet you," said the young man, shortly, as he fixed a glass with some difficulty in his eye to stare at the stranger.

"Then you ought to have come," said Eve, quickly. "Take that stupid glass out of your eye, you silly boy," she whispered. Then aloud, "I've been in such trouble, Dick, dear."

"Dick, dear!" He did not know why it was, but this very familiar appellation from those soft red lips seemed to jar on the stranger's ears, and he drew a longer breath than usual.

"I actually got bogged, Dick, and was sinking, when this gentleman came and saved me. Dick, dear, this is our new vicar. Mr. Selwood, this is Mr. Richard Glaire of the Foundry."

"Glad to know you, Mr. Glaire," said the vicar, holding out his hand.

"How do?" said the new-comer, shortly, and his hand went out in a slow, awkward, unwilling way, retiring afterwards from the hearty grasp it received in a very sharp manner, for thin effeminate hands, that do not return an honest pressure, fare badly in a manly grasp, especially if they happen to be half-covered with unnecessary rings.

"How do? Glad to see you," said the young owner of the Foundry, though it was always more looked upon since his father's death as the property of Mrs. Glaire. "Find this rather dull place."

"I don't think I shall," said the vicar, looking at him curiously.

"Very dull place," said the young man, "very. Come, Evey. You'll call, I suppose?"

"Of course I shall," said the vicar, smiling. "I mean to know everybody here."

"Thanks, much," said Mr. Glaire, glancing at Daisy, who gave herself an angry twitch, and turned away. He then drew Eve's arm through his own, and, raising his hat slightly to the vicar, was turning away when his eye lit on the young workman. "Hallo you, Tom Podmore," he cried, "how is it you're not at work?"

"That's my business," growled the man. "I'll tell you that when you ain't got young missus there wi' you, and I wean't afore."

Richard Glaire looked at the sturdy fellow uneasily, and directed a second glance at Daisy, his vacillating eyes resting for a moment on the pocketed doubled fists before repeating his words shortly—

"Come along, Evey."

"Wait a moment, Dick, dear," she said, disengaging her arm. "How rude you are!" she added in an undertone. "Good day, Mr. Selwood, and thank you very much," she said, ingenuously. "Pray come and see us soon.

Aunt will be so glad to know you. She was talking about you last night, and wondering what you would be like. Good-bye."

She held out her hand, and the constraint that was in spite of himself creeping over the new vicar was thawed away by the genial, innocent sunshine of the young girl's smile.

"Good-bye," he said, frankly; and his face lit up with pleasure. "I shall call very soon, and we won't forget the botany."

"Oh no," said Eve, as her arm was once more pinioned. "Come, Daisy, you are coming up to the house."

"No, thank you, miss; I must go home now."

As she spoke she hurried forward, tripped over the stile first, and was gone.

A minute later and Eve had lightly touched Richard Glaire's arm, and climbed the stile in her turn, leaving the vicar to follow slowly, forgetful of the presence of the young workman—Podmore.

He was brought back from his dreamy musings on the relation existing between the young fellow who had just gone, and the sweet innocent girl who was his companion, by a rough grasp being laid upon his arm, and turning sharply, there stood Tom Podmore, with the veins in his forehead swelling, and his face black with rage.

CHAPTER II.

TOM PODMORE'S GRIEVANCE.

"Look here, parson," cried the young workman, in a voice husky with emotion; and as he spoke he dashed his cap upon the ground and began to roll up his sleeves, displaying arms fit, with their sturdy rolls of muscle, for a young Hercules. "Look here, parson. You're a stranger here, and I'll tell 'ee. That's my master, that is, and I shall kill him afore I've done."

"Hush, man, hush!" cried the young vicar.

"I don't keer, I shall. Why ain't I at work, eh? Never another stroke will I do for him; wish that my hammer may come on my head if I do. Look here, parson," he went on, catching the other's arm hard in a

grasp of iron, "that's his lass, that is—that's his young lady—Miss Eve Pelly; God bless her for a perfect angel, and too good for him. He's engaged to her, he is—engaged to be married, and he's got thousands and thousands of his own, and the Foundry, and horses to hunt wi' and he ain't satisfied. No, no; I ain't done yet. Look here, ain't all that enough for any man? You know what's right, and what ain't. What call's he got to come between me and she?"

He jerked one fist in the direction taken by Daisy, and went on.

"Things ran all right between us before he steps in with his London dandy air, and his short coot hair, and fine clothes. Old Joe Banks was willing; and as for Missus Banks, why, bless her, she's always been like a mother to me. I'd saved up a hundred and sixty pun' ten, all hard earnings, and we was soon to be married, and then he comes between us and turns the girl's head. You come on to me when I'd gone up the hill side there, to chew it all over, after she'd huffed me this morning, and I coot up rough. I say, warn't it enough to make any man coot up rough?"

"It was, indeed, Podmore," said the vicar, kindly.

"But I wean't stand it, that I wean't," roared the young man, like an angry bull. "A man's a man, even if he is a master. I'll fight fair; but if I don't break every bone in his false skin, my name ain't Tom Podmore."

This burst over, he resumed his cap and snatched down his sleeves, looking half ashamed of his effusion in the presence of a stranger, and he shrank away a little as the vicar laid his hand upon his arm.

"Look here, Podmore," he said, kindly; "when I went first to school they used to give me for a copy to write, 'Do nothing rashly.' Don't you do anything rashly, my friend, because things done in haste are repented of at leisure. I have come down here to be a friend, I hope, to everybody, and as you were the first man I met in Dumford, I shall look upon you as one of the first to have a call upon me."

"Thanky, sir, thanky kindly," said Podmore, in a

quieter tone. "I don't know how it is, but you've got a kind of way with you that gets over a fellow."

"She seems a nice, pretty, well-behaved girl, that Daisy Banks," said the vicar.

"There isn't a better nor a truer-hearted girl, nor a prettier nowhere for twenty miles round," cried the young fellow, flushing up with a lover's pride. "Why look at her, sir, side by side with Miss Eve, that's a born lady. Why, Miss Eve's that delicate and poor beside my Daisy, as their ain't no comparison 'tween 'em. My Daisy, as was," he added, sorrowfully. "Something's come over her like of late, and it's all over now."

The great strong fellow turned his back, and resting one hand upon the stile, his broad shoulders gave a heave or two.

"I shan't take on about it," he said, roughly, as he turned round with a sharp, defiant air of recklessness. "I ain't the first fool that's been jilted by a woman. Say, parson—hundred and sixty pound 'll buy a sight o' gills o' ale. Don't you take no heed o' what I said."

He was turning away, but a strong hand was upon his shoulder.

"Look here, Podmore," said the vicar, firmly, "you said something about fools just now. You are not a fool, and you know it. You leave the ale alone—to the fools—and go back and get to work as hard, or harder, than you ever worked before. I shall see you again soon, perhaps bowl to you in the cricket field. As for your affairs, you leave them to me. Do you know why Englishmen make the best soldiers?"

"Do I know why Englishmen make the best soldiers, parson?" said Podmore, staring. "No: can't say I do."

"Because, my lad, they never know when they are beaten. Now, you are not beaten yet. Good-bye."

He held out his hand, and the great grimy, horny palm of the workman came down into it with a loud clap, and the grip that ensued from each side would have been unpleasant to any walnut between their palms.

Then they parted, taking different routes, and ten minutes later the Reverend Murray Selwood was walking

quietly through the empty town street, quite conscious though that head after head was being thrust out to have a look at the stranger.

There was the usual sprinkling of shops and private houses, great blank red-brick dwellings, which told their own tale of being the houses of the lawyer, the doctor, and their newer opponents. Then there was the factory-looking place, with great gates to the yard, and a time-keeper's lodge inside, surmounted by a bell in its little wooden hutch. The throb of machinery could be heard, and the shriek of metal being tortured into civilized form came painfully to the ear from time to time. Smoke hung heavily in the air—smoke tinged with lurid flame; and above all came the roar of the reverberating furnaces, where steel or some alloy was being fused for the castings which had made out-of-the-way, half-savage Dumford, with its uncouth, independent people, famous throughout the length and breadth of the land.

There were very few people visible, for the works had not yet begun to pour forth their masses of working bees, but there were plenty of big rough lads hanging about the corners of the streets.

"I wonder what sort of order the schools are in," said the new vicar to himself, as he neared the church, towards which he was bending his steps, meaning to glance round before entering the vicarage. "Yes, I wonder what sort of a condition they are in. Bad, I fear. Very bad, I'm sure," he added.

For at that moment a great lump of furnace refuse, or glass, there known as slag, struck him a heavy blow in the back.

He turned sharply, but not a soul was visible, and he stooped and picked up the lump, which was nearly equal in size to his fist.

"Yes, no doubt about it, very bad," he said. "Well, I'll take you to my new home, and you shall have the first position in my cabinet of specimens, being kept as a memorial of my welcome to Dumford."

"Well," he said, as he reached the church gate, "I've made two friends already, and—perhaps—an enemy. By Jove, there's another brick!"

CHAPTER III.

AT THE FOUNDRY HOUSE.

MRS. GLAIRE lived in a great blank-looking red-brick house in the main street, two ugly steep stone steps coming down from the front door on to the narrow kidney pebble path, and encroaching so upon the way that they were known as the tipsy-turvies, in consequence of the number of excited Dumfordites who fell over them in the dark. Though for the matter of that they were awkward for the most sober wayfarer, and in a town with a Local Board would have been condemned long before.

The ugliness of the Foundry House, as it was called, only dwelt on the side giving on the street; the back opened upon an extensive garden, enclosed by mighty red-brick walls, for the greater part concealed by the dense foliage, which made the fine old garden a bosky wilderness of shady lawn, walk, and shrubbery.

For Mrs. Glaire was great upon flowers, in fact, after "my son, Richard," her garden stood at the top of her affections, even before her niece, Eve, whom she loved very dearly all the same.

Mrs. Glaire was a little busy ant of a woman, with a pleasant, fair face, ornamented with two tufts of little fuzzy blonde curls, which ought to have hung down, but which seemed to be screwed up so tightly that they took delight in sticking out at all kinds of angles, one or two of the most wanton—those with the rough ends—that had been untwisted by Mrs. Glaire's curl-papers, even going so far as to stick straight up.

On the morning when the new vicar made his entry into Dumford, Mrs. Glaire was out in her garden busy. She had on her brown holland apron, and her print drawn hood, the strings of which seemed to cut deeply into her little double chin, and altogether did nothing to improve her personal appearance. A little basket was in one hand half-filled with the dead leaves of geraniums which she had been snipping off with the large garden scissors she held in the other hand—scissors, which, for fear of

being mislaid, were attached to a silken cord, evidently the former trimming of some article of feminine attire, and this cord was tied round her waist.

She had two attendants—Prince and the gardener Jacky Budd—Jacky: for it was the peculiarity of Dumford that everybody was known by a familiar interpretation of his Christian name, or else by a *sobriquet* more quaint than pleasant.

Prince was a King Charles spaniel, with the shortest of snub noses, the most protrusive of great intelligent eyes, and long silky ears that nearly swept the ground. Prince had a weakness, and that was fat. He had been fed into such a state of rotundity that he had long ceased running and barking, even at cats, against which he was supposed to have a wonderful antipathy, and he passed his time after his regular meals in sleeping, when he was lying down, and wheezing when he was standing up, and never if he could possibly help it did he move from the position in which he was placed.

Jacky Budd, the gardener, was a pale, sodden-looking man, the only tinge of colour in his countenance being in his nose, and that tinge was given by a few fiery veins. He had a knack when addressed of standing with one thumb stuck in the arm-hole of his ragged vest, which was stretched and worn in consequence, and this attitude was a favourite with him on Sundays, and was maintained just inside the south door till all the people were in church, when he went to his own sitting beneath the reading-desk—for Jacky Budd, in addition to being a gardener, was the parish clerk.

Jacky had his weakness, like Prince, but it was very different from that of the dog; in fact, it was one that troubled a great many of the people of Dumford, who looked upon it with very lenient eyes. For though the gentleman in question had been suspended by the late vicar for being intoxicated in church, and saying out loud in reading the psalms, "As it (hic) was in the beginning (hic) is now (hic) and ever shall be (hic)," he was penitent and forgiven at the end of the week, and he sinned no more until the next time.

The late vicar was compelled to take notice of the back-

sliding, even though people said he was troubled with the same weakness, for Miss Purley, the doctor's sister, burst out laughing quite loud in consequence of a look given her by Richard Glaire from the opposite pew. Her brother was there, and to pass it off he made a stir about it, and had her carried out, to come back after a few minutes on tip-toe and whisper to two or three people that it was a touch of hysterics.

Those who knew Jacky could tell when he had been drinking from the stolid look upon his countenance, and Mrs. Glaire was one of those who knew him.

"Come along, Prince," she cried in a shrill chirpy treble, and stooping down she lifted and carried Prince a few yards, to set him down beside a rustic flower-stand, rubbing his leg with the rim of the basket, and Prince went on wheezing, while his mistress began to snip.

Jacky followed slowly with a pot of water, a fluid that he held in detestation, and considered to be only useful for watering flowers.

"Now, Jacky," exclaimed his mistress, "these pots are quite dry. Give them all some water."

"Yes, mum," said Jacky; and raising the pot, he began with trembling hands to direct erratic streams amongst the flowers, then shaking his head, stopping, and examining the spout as if that were in fault.

"Stone got in it, I think," he muttered.

"You've been drinking again, Jacky," exclaimed his mistress, shaking the scissors at him threateningly.

"Drinking, mum! drinking!"

This in a tone of injured surprise.

"Yes, you stupid man. Do you think I don't know; I can smell you."

"Drinking!" said Jacky, putting his hands to his head, as if to collect his thoughts. "Yes, so I did; I had a gill of ale last night."

"Now, Jacky, I won't have it," exclaimed Mrs. Glaire. "If you try to deceive me I won't keep you on."

"What, and turn away a faithful servant as made this garden what it is, mum, and nursed Master Dick when he was a bit of a bairn no bigger than——"

Jacky stooped down to try and show how many inches

high Dick Glaire was when his nursing days were on, and as the gardener placed his hand horizontally, it seemed that about six inches must have been the stature of the child. But this was a dangerous experiment, and Jacky nearly overbalanced himself. A sharp question from his mistress, however, brought him upright, and somewhat sobered him.

"Have you heard any more about that, Jacky?"

"'Bout Master Richard, mum?"

"Yes, Jacky. But mind this, I hate tale-bearing and the gossip of the place."

"You do, mum; you allus did," said Jacky, winking solemnly to himself; "but that's a fact."

"I won't believe it, Jacky," said Mrs. Glaire, snipping off sound leaves and blossoms in her agitation.

"It's a fact, mum, and I don't wonder at your feeling popped."

"I'm not cross at all, Jacky," exclaimed Mrs. Glaire, with her face working, "for I don't believe my son would stoop in that way."

"But it's a fack, mum; and you must send him away, or he'll be taking a wife from among the Midianitish women. That's so."

"Now, I don't want to hear gossip, man; but what have you heard? There, do stand still, or you'll tread on Prince."

"Heard, mum? Lots. You should say, 'What have you seen?'"

"Seen! Have you seen anything?"

Jacky put his thumb very far into his arm-hole, and spread his fingers very wide, as he rolled his head solemnly.

"You won't tell Master Richard as you heard of it from me, mum?"

"No, Jacky, no; certainly not."

"And get me kicked out without a moment's notice?"

"No, no, certainly not. Now tell me directly."

"Well, mum, Missus Hubley says as she knows he's always arter her."

"What, Daisy Banks?"

Jacky nodded.

"But she's a mischief-making, gossiping old—woman!" exclaimed Mrs. Glaire; "and her word isn't worth anything. You said you had seen something?"

Jacky nodded, and screwed up his face as he laid his finger beside his nose.

"If you don't speak directly, man, I shall do you a mischief," exclaimed the little woman, excitedly. "Tell me all you know this instant."

"Well, you see, mum, it was like this: last night was very dark, and my missus said to me, 'Jacky,' she says, 'take the boocket and go down to Brown's poomp and get a boocket o' watter.' Because you see, mum, the sucker being wore, our poomp's not agate just now."

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Glaire, impatiently.

"Well, mum, I goes round by Kitty Rawson's corner, and out back way, and I come upon Master Richard wi' his arm round Daisy Banks's waist."

"Now, Jacky," exclaimed Mrs. Glaire, with a hysterical sob, "if this is not the truth I'll never, never forgive you."

"Truth, mum," said Jacky, in an ill-used tone. "I've been clerk here a matter o' twenty year, and my father and grandfather before me, and would I tell a lie, do you think? Speak the truth without fear or favour. Amen."

"Go away now," cried Mrs. Glaire, sharply.

"Wean't I water all the plants, mum?"

"No; go away, and if you say a word to a soul about this, I'll never forgive you, Jacky, never."

"Thanky, mum, thanky," said Jacky, turning to go, and nearly trampling on Prince.

"No, come here!" exclaimed Mrs. Glaire, whose face was working. "Go round to the foundry, and tell Joe Banks I want to speak to him. Tell him I'm in the garden."

"Yes, mum."

"Jacky," she said, calling him back.

"Yes, mum."

"Don't you dare to say a word about what it's for."

"No, mum."

Jacky went off round by his tool-shed, out into the street, and down to the foundry gates, where, after a word

with the gateman, he went on across the great metal-strewn yard in search of Mrs. Glaire's sturdy foreman.

Meanwhile that lady caught up her dog, and carried him to a garden seat, where, upon being set down, he curled up and went to sleep, his tail and ears combined making a comfortable coverlid. Then taking off her scissors and placing them in her basket, Mrs. Glaire seated herself, sighing deeply, and taking out from a voluminous pocket—which took sundry evolutions with drapery to reach—a great ball of lambswool and a couple of knitting pins, she began to knit rapidly what was intended to be some kind of undergarment for her only son.

"Oh, Dick, Dick," she muttered; "you'll break my heart before you've done."

The knitting pins clicked loudly, and a couple of bright tears stole down her cheeks and dropped into her lap.

"And I did not tell him to hold his tongue before Eve," she exclaimed, sharply. "Tut-tut—tut—tut! This must be stopped; this must be stopped."

The sighing, lamenting phase gave place by degrees to an angry one. The pins clicked sharply, and the pleasant grey head was perked, while the lips were tightened together, even as were the stitches in the knitting, which had to be all undone.

Just then the garden door opened, and a broad-shouldered grizzled man of seven or eight and forty entered the garden followed by Jacky. Foreman though he was, Joe Banks had been hard at work, and his hands and face bore the grime of the foundry. He had, however, thrown on a jacket, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead, leaving a half clean line over his pale blue eyes, while a pleasant smile puckered such of his face as was not hidden by his closely-cut grizzled beard.

"Sarvant, ma'am," he said, making a rough bow to the lady of the house.

"Good morning, Banks," said Mrs. Glaire. "Jacky go and nail up that wistaria, and mind you don't tumble off the ladder."

Jacky looked injured, but walked off, evidently making a bee line for the tool-shed, one which he did not keep.

"Little on, mum," said the foreman, with a wise nod in Jacky's direction. "Wants a month's illness to be a warnin'."

"It's a pity, Banks, but he will drink."

"Like lots more on 'em, ma'am. Why if I was to get shut of all the lads in the works there who like their drop of drink, I shouldn't have half enew."

"How are things going on, Banks?" said Mrs. Glaire.

The foreman looked at her curiously, for it was a new thing for his mistress to make any inquiry about the foundry. A few months back and he had to make his daily reports, but since Richard Glaire had come of age, Mrs. Glaire had scrupulously avoided interfering in any way, handing over the business management to "my son."

"I said how are things going on in the foundry, Banks," said the lady again, for the foreman had coughed, and shuffled from one foot on to the other.

"Do you wish me to tell you, ma'am?" he said at last.

"Tell me? of course," said Mrs. Glaire, impatiently. "How are matters?"

"Bad."

"Bad? What do you mean?"

"Well, mum, not bad as to work; 'cause there's plenty of that, and nothing in the way of contracts as is like to suffer by waiting."

"Then, what do you mean?"

"Well, you see, ma'am, Mr. Richard don't get on wi' the men. He wants to have it all his own way, and they want to have it all theirn. Well, of course that wean't work; so what's wanted is for the governor to give way just a little, and then they'd give way altogether."

"But I'm sure my son Richard's management is excellent," said Mrs. Glaire, whose lip quivered a little as she drew herself up with dignity, and began a fresh row of her knitting.

Banks coughed slightly, and remained silent.

"Don't you think so, Banks?"

"Well, you see, ma'am, he's a bit arbitrary."

"Arbitrary? What do you mean, Banks?"

"Well, you see, ma'am, he turned Sim Slee off at a moment's notice."

"And quite right, too," said Mrs. Glaire, hotly. "My son told me. The fellow is a spouting, mouthing creature."

"He is that, ma'am, and as lazy as a slug, but it made matters worse, and just now there's a deal of strikes about, and the men at other places listening to delegates from societies, and joining unions, and all that sort of stuff."

"And have you joined one of those clubs, Joe Banks?" said Mrs. Glaire, sharply.

"Me join 'em, ma'am? Not I," said Banks, who seemed immensely tickled at the idea. "Not I. I'm foreman, and get my wage reg'lar, and I don't want none of their flummery. You should hear Ann go on about 'em."

"I beg your pardon, Banks," said Mrs. Glaire. "I might have known that you were too sensible a man to go to these meetings."

"Well, as to being sensible, I don't know about that, Missus Glaire. Them two women folk at home do about what they like wi' me."

"I don't believe it, Joe," said Mrs. Glaire. "Daisy would not have grown up such a good, sensible girl if she had not had a firm, kind, sensible father."

"God bless her!" said Joe, and a little moisture appeared in one eye. Then speaking rather huskily—"Thank you, ma'am—thank you, Missus Glaire. I try to do my duty by her, and so does Ann."

"Is Ann quite well?"

"Quite well, thank you kindly, ma'am," said the foreman." "Don't you be afeared for me, Missus Glaire. I worked with Richard Glaire, senior, thirty years ago, two working lads, and we was always best of friends both when we was poor, and when I saw him gradually grow rich, for he had a long head, had your husband, while I'd only got a square one. But I stuck to him, and he stuck to me, and when he died, leaving me his foreman, you know, Mrs. Glaire, how he sent for me, and 'Joe,' he says, 'good-bye, God bless you! You've always been my right hand man. Stick to my son.'"

"He did, Joe, he did," said Mrs. Glaire, with a deep sigh, and a couple of tears fell on her knitting.

"And I'll stick to him through thick and thin," said the foreman, stoutly. "For I never envied Dick, his father—there, 'tain't 'spectful to you, ma'am, to say Dick, though it comes natural—I never envied Master Glaire his success with his contracts, and getting on to be a big man. I was happy enough; but you know, ma'am, young Master Dick is arbitrary; he is indeed, and he can't feel for a working man like his father did."

"He is more strict, you see, Banks, that is all," said Mrs. Glaire, stiffly; and the foreman screwed up his face a little.

"You advise him not to be quite so strict, ma'am. I wouldn't advise you wrong, as you know."

"I know that, Joe Banks," said Mrs. Glaire, smiling pleasantly; "and I'll say a word to him. But I wanted to say something to you."

"Well, I've been a wondering why you sent for me, ma'am," said the foreman, bluntly.

"You see," said Mrs. Glaire, hesitating, "there are little bits of petty tattle about."

"What, here, ma'am," said the foreman, with a hearty laugh. "Of course there is, and always was, and will be."

"But they are about Daisy," said Mrs. Glaire, dashing at last into the matter.

"I should just like to get hold of the man as said a word against my lass," said Banks, stretching out a tremendous fist. "I'd crack him, I would, like a nut. But what have they been saying?"

CHAPTER IV.

DAISY'S FATHER.

"Well," said Mrs. Glaire, who found her task more difficult than she had apprehended, "the fact is, they say she has been seen talking to my son."

"Is that all?" said the foreman, laughing in a quiet, hearty way.

"Yes, that is all, and for Daisy's sake I want it stopped. Have you heard or known anything?"

"Well, to put it quite plain, the missus wants her to have Tom Podmore down at the works there, but the girl hangs back, and I found out the reason. I did see Master Dick talking to her one night, and it set me a thinking."

"And you didn't stop it?" exclaimed Mrs. Glaire, sharply.

"Stop it? Why should I stop it?" said the foreman. "She's getting on for twenty, and is sure to begin thinking about sweethearts. Ann did when she was nineteen, and if I recollect right, little fair-haired Lisbeth Ward was only eighteen when she used to blush on meeting Dick Glaire. I see her do it," said the bluff fellow, chuckling.

"But that was long ago," exclaimed Mrs. Glaire, excitedly. "Positions are changed since then. My son——"

"Well, ma'am, he's a workman's son, and my bairn's a workman's daughter. I've give her a good schooling, and she's as pretty a lass as there is in these parts, and if your son Richard's took a fancy to her, and asks me to let him marry her, and the lass likes him, why I shall say yes, like a man."

Mrs. Glaire looked at him aghast. This was a turn in affairs she had never anticipated, and one which called forth all her knowledge of human nature to combat.

"But," she exclaimed, "he is engaged to his cousin here, Miss Pelly."

"Don't seem like it," chuckled the foreman. "Why, he's always after Daisy now."

"Oh, this is dreadful!" gasped Mrs. Glaire, dropping her knitting. "I tell you he is engaged—promised to be married to his second cousin, Miss Pelly."

"Stuff!" said Banks, laughing. "He'll never marry she, though she's a good, sweet girl."

"Don't I tell you he will?" gasped Mrs. Glaire. "Man, man, are you blind? This is dreadful to me, but I must speak. Has it never struck you that my son may have wrong motives with respect to your child?"

"What?" roared the foreman; and the veins in his forehead swelled out, as his fist clenched. "Bah!" he exclaimed, resuming his calmness. "Nonsense, ma'am, nonsense. What! Master Dicky Glaire, my true old friend's son, mean wrong by my lass, Daisy? Mrs. Glaire, ma'am, Mrs. Glaire, for shame, for shame!"

"The man's infatuated!" exclaimed Mrs. Glaire; and she stared wonderingly at the bluff, honest fellow before her.

"Why, ma'am," said the foreman, smiling, "I wouldn't believe it of him if you swore it. He's arbitrary, and he's too fond of his horses, and dogs, and sporting; but my Daisy! Oh, for shame, ma'am, for shame! He loves the very ground on which she walks."

"And—and—" stammered Mrs. Glaire, "does—does Daisy care for him? Fool that I was to let her come here and be so intimate with Eve," she muttered.

"Well, ma'am," said the foreman, thoughtfully, "I'm not so sure about that."

He was about to say more when Mrs. Glaire stopped him.

"Another time, Banks, another time," she said, hastily. "Here is my son."

As she spoke Richard Glaire came into the garden, with his hands in his pockets, and Eve Pelly clinging to one arm, looking bright and happy.

The foreman started slightly, but gave himself a jerk and smiled, and then, in obedience to a gesture from his mistress, he left the garden and returned to the foundry.

CHAPTER V.

THE VICAR'S STROLL.

THE brick, as the vicar called it, was only another piece of slag; but he did not turn his head, only smiled, and began thinking that Dumford quite equalled the report he had heard of it. Then looking round the plain old church, peering inside through the windows, and satisfying himself that its architectural beauties were not of a very striking nature, he turned aside and entered the vicarage garden, giving a sigh of satisfaction on finding

that his home was a comfortable red-brick, gable-ended house, whose exterior, with its garden overrun with weeds, promised well in its traces of former cultivation.

A ring at a bell by the side post of the door brought forth a wan, washed-out looking woman, who looked at the visitor from top to toe, ending by saying sharply, in a vinegary tone of voice—

"What d'yer want?"

"To come in," said the vicar, smiling. "Are you in charge of the house?"

"If yow want to go over t'church yow must go to Jacky Budd's down street for the keys. I wean't leave place no more for nobody."

"But I don't want to go over the church—at least, not now. I want to come in, and see about having a room or two made comfortable."

"Are yow t'new parson, then?"

"Yes, I'm the new parson."

"Ho! Then yow'd best come in."

The door was held open, and, looking at him very suspiciously, the lady in charge, to wit, Mrs. Simeon Slee, allowed the vicar to enter, and then followed him as he went from room to room, making up his mind what he should do as he ran his eye over the proportions of the house, finding in the course of his peregrinations that Mrs. Slee had installed herself in the dining-room, which apparently served for kitchen as well, and had turned the pretty little drawing-room, opening into a shady verandah and perfect wilderness of a garden, into a very sparsely furnished bed-room.

"That will do," said the vicar. "I suppose I can get some furniture in the town?"

"Oh, yes, yow can get plenty furniture if you've got t'money. Only they wean't let yow have anything wi'out. They don't like strangers."

"I dare say I can manage what I want, Mrs.—Mrs.—What is your name?"

"Hey?"

"I say, what is your name?"

"Martha," said the woman, as if resenting an impertinence.

"Your other name. I see you are a married woman."

He pointed to the thin worn ring on her finger.

"Oh, yes, I'm married," said the woman, bitterly; "worse luck."

"You have no children, I suppose?"

"Not I."

"I am sorry for that."

"Sorry? I'm not. What should I have children for? To pine; while their shack of a father is idling about town and talking wind?"

"They would have been a comfort to you, maybe," said the vicar, quietly. "I hope your husband does not drink?"

"Drink?" said the woman, with a harsh laugh. "Yes, I almost wish he did more; it would stop his talking."

"Is he a workman—at the foundry?"

"Sometimes, but Mr. Dicky Glaire's turned him off again, and now he's doing nowt."

"Never mind, don't be downhearted. Times mend when they come to the worst."

"No, they don't," said the woman, sharply. "If they did they'd have mended for me."

"Well, well," said the vicar, "we will talk about that another time;" and he took the two pieces of slag from his pocket, and placed them on the mantelpiece of the little study, where they were now standing.

"Some one threw them at yow?" said the woman.

"Yes," said the vicar, smiling.

"Just like 'em. They don't like strangers here."

"So it seems," said the vicar. "But you did not tell me your name, Mrs.——"

"Slee, they call me, Slee," was the sulky reply.

"Well, Mrs. Slee," said the vicar, "I have had a good long walk, and I'm very hungry. If I give you the money will you get me something to eat, while I go down the town and order in some furniture for this little room and the bed-room above?"

"Why, the Lord ha' mussy! You're never coming into the place this how?"

"Indeed, Mrs. Slee, but I am. There's half a sovereign; go and do the best you can."

"But the place ought to be clent before you come in."

"Oh, we'll get that done by degrees. You will see about something for me to eat. I shall be back in an hour. But tell me first, if I want to get into the church, who has the keys?"

"Mr. Budd—Mrs. Slee pronounced it Bood—"has 'em; he's churchwarden, and lives over yonder."

"What, at that little old-fashioned house?"

"Nay, nay, mun, that's th'owd vicarage. Next house."

"Oh," said the vicar, looking curiously at the little, old-fashioned, sunken, thatch-roofed place. "And who lives there?"

"Owd Isaac Budd."

"Another Mr. Budd; and who is he?"

"Th'other one's brother."

"Where shall I find the clerk—what is his name?" said the vicar.

"Oh, Jacky Budd," said Mrs. Slee. "He lives down south end."

"I'm afraid I shall get confused with so many Budds," said the vicar, smiling. "Is that the Mr. Budd who leads the singing?"

"Oh, no, that's Mr. Ned Budd, who lives down town. He's nowt to do wi' Jacky."

"Well, I'll leave that now," said the vicar. "But I want some one to fetch a portmanteau from Churley. How am I to get it here?"

"Mrs. Budd will fetch it."

"And who is she?"

"The Laddonthorpe carrier."

"Good; and where shall I find her?"

"Over at Ted Budd's yard—the Black Horse."

"Budd again," said the vicar. "Is everybody here named Budd?"

"Well, no," said the woman, "not ivery body, but there's a strange sight of 'em all ower the town, and they're most all on 'em cousins or sum'at. But there, I must get to wuck."

The woman seemed galvanised into a fresh life by the

duties she saw before her; and almost before the strange visitor had done speaking she was putting on a print hood, and preparing to start.

"It will make a very comfortable place when I have got it in order," said the vicar to himself, as he passed down the front walk. "Now to find some chairs and tables."

This was no very difficult task, especially as the furniture dealer received a couple of crisp bank-notes on account. In fact, one hand-truck full of necessaries was despatched before the vicar left the shop and made up his mind to see a little more of the place before returning to his future home.

Perhaps he would have been acting more wisely if he had sent in a load of furniture and announcements of his coming, with orders for the place to be put in readiness; but the Reverend Murray Selwood was eccentric, and knowing that he had an uncouth set of people to deal with, he had made up his mind to associate himself with them in every way, so as to be thoroughly identified with the people, and become one of them as soon as possible.

His way led him round by the great works of the town—Glaire's Bell Foundry—and as he came nearer, a loud buzz of voices increased to a roar, that to him, a stranger, seemed too great for the ordinary transaction of business; and so it proved.

On all sides, as he went on, he saw heads protruded from doors and windows, and an appearance of excitement, though he seemed in his own person to transfer a good deal of the public attention to himself.

A minute or two later, and he found himself nearing a crowd of a couple of hundred workmen, who were being harangued by a tall thin man, in workman's costume, save that he wore a very garish plaid waistcoat, whose principal colour was scarlet.

This man, who was swinging his arms about, and gesticulating energetically, was shouting in a hoarse voice. His words were disconnected, and hard to catch, but "Downtrodden,"—"bloated oligarchs,"—"British pluck,"—"wucking man,"—"slavery,"—and "mesters," reached the vicar's ears as he drew nearer.

Suddenly there was a movement in the crowd, and the speaker seemed to be hustled from the top of the stone post which he had chosen for his rostrum, and then, amid yells and hootings, it seemed that the crowd had surrounded a couple of men who had been hemmed in while making their way towards the great gates, and they now stood at bay, with their backs to the high brick wall, while the mob formed a semicircle a few feet from them.

It was rather hard work, and wanted no little elbowing, but without a moment's hesitation, the vicar began to force his way through the crowd; and as he got nearer to the hemmed-in men, he could hear some of the words passing to and fro.

"Why, one of them is my friend, Mr. Richard Glaire," said the vicar to himself, as he caught sight of the pale trembling figure, standing side by side with a heavy grizzled elderly workman, who stood there with his hat off, evidently bent on defending the younger man.

"Yow come out o' that, Joe Banks, an' leave him to us," roared a great bull-headed hammerman, who was evidently one of the ringleaders.

"Keep off, you great coward," was the answer.

"Gie him a blob, Harry; gie him a blob," shouted a voice.

"My good men—my good men," faltered Richard Glaire, trying to make himself heard; but there was a roar of rage and hatred, and the men pressed forward, fortunately carrying with them the vicar, and too intent upon their proposed victims to take any notice of the strange figure elbowing itself to the front.

"Where are the police, Banks—the police?"

"Yah! He wants the police," shouted a shrill voice, which came from the man in the red waistcoat. "He's trampled down the rights of man, and now he wants the brutal mummy-dons of the law."

"Yah!" roared the crowd, and they pressed on.

"Banks, what shall we do?" whispered Glaire; "they'll murder us."

"They won't murder me," said the foreman, stolidly.

"But they will me. What shall we do?"

"Faight," said the foreman, sturdily.

"I can't fight. I'll promise them anything," groaned the young man. "Here, my lads," he cried, "I'll promise you——"

"Yah! You wean't keep your promises," roared those nearest. "Down with them. Get hold of him, Harry."

The big workman made a dash at Richard Glaire, and got him by the collar, dragging him from the wall just as the foreman, who tried to get before him, was good-humouredly baffled by half-a-dozen men, who took his blows for an instant, and then held him helpless against the bricks.

It would have gone hard with the young owner of the works, for an English mob, when excited and urged to action, is brutal enough for the moment, before their manly feelings resume their sway, and shame creeps in to stare them in the face. He would probably have been hustled, his clothes torn from his back, and a rain of blows have fallen upon him till he sank exhausted, when he would have been kicked and trampled upon till he lay insensible, with half his ribs broken, and there he would have been left.

"Police! Where are the police?" shouted the young man.

"Shut themselves up to be safe," roared a lusty voice; and the young man grew dizzy with fear, as he gazed wildly round at the sea of menacing faces screaming and struggling to get at him.

As he cowered back a blow struck him on the forehead, and another on the lip, causing the blood to trickle down, while the great hammerman held him forward, struggling helplessly in his grasp.

At that moment, when, sick with fear and pain, Richard Glaire's legs were failing him, and he was about to sink helpless among his men, something white seemed to whiz by his ear, to be followed instantly by a heavy thud. There was a jerk at his collar, and he would have fallen, but a strong arm was thrown before him; and then it seemed to him that the big workman Harry had staggered back amongst his friends, as a loud voice exclaimed:

"Call yourselves Englishmen? A hundred to one!"

The new vicar's bold onslaught saved Richard Glaire for the moment, and the men fell back, freeing the foreman as they did so. It was only for the moment, though, and then with a yell of fury the excited mob closed in upon their victims.

CHAPTER VI.

MOTHER AND SON.

MATTERS looked very bad for the new vicar, and for him he had tried to save, for though the foreman was now ready and free to lend his aid, and Richard Glaire, stung by his position into action, had recovered himself sufficiently to turn with all the feebleness of the trampled worm against his assailants, the fierce wave was ready to dash down upon them and sweep them away.

Harry, the big hammerman, had somewhat recovered himself, and was shaking his head as if to get rid of a buzzing sensation, and murmurs loud and deep were arising, when the shrill voice of the man in the red waistcoat arose.

"Now, lads, now's your time. Trample down them as is always trampling on you and your rights. Smite 'em hip and thigh."

"Come on, and show 'em how to do it," roared a sturdy voice, and Tom Podmore thrust himself before the vicar, and faced the mob. "Come on and show 'em how, Sim Slee; and let's see as you ain't all wind."

There was a derisive shout at this, and the man in the red waistcoat began again.

"Down with them, boys. Down with Tom Podmore, too; he's a sneak—a rat. Yah!"

"I'll rat you, you ranting bagpipe," cried Tom, loudly. "Stand back, lads; this is new parson, and him as touches him has to come by me first. Harry, lad, come o' my side; you don't bear no malice again a man as can hit like that."

"Not I," said Harry, thrusting his great head forward, to stare full in the vicar's face. "Dal me, but you are a stout un, parson; gie's your fist. It's a hard un."

It was given on the instant, and the hearty pressure told the vicar that he had won a new ally.

"As for the governor," cried Tom, "you may do what you like wi' him, lads, for I shan't tak' his part."

"Podmore," whispered the vicar, "for Heaven's sake be a man, and help me."

"I am a man, parson, and I'll help you like one; but as for him—" he cried, darting a malignant look at Richard Glaire.

He did not finish his sentence, for at that moment the man in the red waistcoat mounted a post, and cried again:

"Down with 'em, lads; down with——"

He, too, did not finish his sentence, for at that moment, either by accident or malicious design, the orator was upset; and, so easily changed is the temper of a crowd, a loud laugh arose.

But the danger was not yet passed, for those nearest seemed ready to drag their employer from his little body-guard.

"You'll help me, then, Podmore?" cried the vicar, hastily. "Come, quick, to the gate."

The veins were swelling in Tom Podmore's forehead, and he glanced as fiercely as any at his master, but the vicar's advice seemed like a new law to him, and joining himself to his defenders, with the great hammerman, they backed slowly to the gate, through the wicket, by which Richard Glaire darted, and the others followed, the vicar coming last and facing the crowd.

The little door in the great gates was clapped to directly, and then there came heavy blows with stones, and a few kicks, followed by a burst of hooting and yelling, after which the noise subsided, and the little party inside began to breathe more freely.

"Thanky, Tom Podmore, my lad," said Banks, shaking him by the hand. "I'm glad you turned up as you did."

Tom nodded in a sulky way, and glowered at his master, but he pressed the foreman's hand warmly.

"I'd fight for you, Joe Banks, till I dropped, if it was only for her sake; but not for him."

Meanwhile Harry, the big hammerman, was walking round the vicar and inspecting him, just as a great dog would look at a stranger.

"Say, parson, can you wrastle?" he said at last.

"Yes, a little," was the reply, with a smile.

"I'd maybe like to try a fall wi' ye."

"I think we've had enough athletics for one day," was the reply. "Look at my hand."

He held out his bleeding knuckles, and the hammerman grinned.

"That's my head," he said. "'Tis a hard un, ain't it?"

"The hardest I ever hit," said the vicar, smiling.

"Is it, parson—is it now?" said Harry, with his massive face lighting up with pride. "Hear that, Tom? Hear that, Joe Banks?"

He stood nodding his head and chuckling, as if he had received the greatest satisfaction from this announcement; and then, paying no heed to the great bruise on his forehead, which was plainly puffing up, he sat down on a pile of old metal, lit his pipe, and looked on.

"I hope you are not hurt, Mr. Glaire?" said the vicar. "This is a strange second meeting to-day."

"No," exclaimed Richard, grinding his teeth, "I'm not hurt—not much. Banks, go into the counting-house, and get me some brandy. Curse them, they've dragged me to pieces."

"Well, you would be so arbitrary with them, and I told you not," said Banks. "I know'd there'd be a row if you did."

"What!" cried Richard, "are you going to side with them?"

"No," said Banks, quietly. "I never sides with the men again the master, and never did; but you would have your own way about taking off that ten per cent."

"I'll take off twenty now," shrieked Richard, stamping about like an angry child. "I'll have them punished for this outrage. I'm a magistrate, and I'll punish them. I'll have the dragoons over from Churley. It's disgraceful, it's a regular riot, and not one of those three wretched policemen to be seen."

"I see one on 'em comin'," growled Harry, grinning; "and he went back again."

"Had you not better try a little persuasion with your workpeople?" said the vicar. "I am quite new here, but it seems to me better than force."

"That's what I tells him, sir," exclaimed Banks, "only he will be so arbitrary."

"Persuasion!" shrieked Richard, who, now that he was safe, was infuriated. "I'll persuade them. I'll starve some of them into submission. What's that? what's that? Is the gate barred?"

He ran towards the building, for at that moment there was a roar outside as if of menace, but immediately after some one shouted—

"Three cheers for Missus Glaire!"

They were given heartily, and then the gate bell was rung lustily.

"It's the Missus," said Banks, going towards the gates.

"Don't open those gates. Stop!" shrieked Richard.

"But it's the Missus come," said Banks, and he peeped through a crack.

"Open the gates, open the gates," cried a dozen voices.

"I don't think you need fear now," said the vicar; "the disturbance is over for the present."

"Fear! I'm not afraid," snarled Richard; "but I won't have those scoundrels in here."

"I'll see as no one else comes in," said Harry, getting up like a small edition of Goliath; and he stood on one side of the wicket gate, while Banks opened it and admitted Mrs. Glaire, with Eve Pelly, who looked ghastly pale.

Several men tried to follow, but the gate was forced to by the united efforts of Harry and the foreman, when there arose a savage yell; but this was drowned by some one proposing once more "Three cheers for the Missus!" and they were given with the greatest gusto, while the next minute twenty heads appeared above the wall and gates, to which some of the rioters had climbed.

"Oh, Richard, my son, what have you been doing?" cried Mrs. Glaire, taking his hand, while Eve Pelly went

up and clung to his arm, gazing tremblingly at his bleeding face and at his disordered apparel.

"There, get away," cried Richard, impatiently, shaking himself free. "What have I been doing? What have those scoundrels been doing, you mean?"

He applied his handkerchief to his bleeding mouth, looking at the white cambric again and again, as he saw that it was stained, and turning very pale and sick, so that he seated himself on a rough mould.

"Dick, dear Dick, are you much hurt?" whispered Eve, going to him again in spite of his repulse, and laying her pretty little hand on his shoulder.

"Hurt? Yes, horribly," he cried, in a pettish way. "You see I am. Don't touch me. Go for the doctor, somebody."

He looked round with a ghastly face, and it was evident that he was going to faint.

"Run, pray run for Mr. Purley," cried Mrs. Glaire.

"I'll go," cried Eve, eagerly.

"I don't think there is any necessity," said the vicar, quietly. Can you get some brandy, my man?" he continued, to Banks. "No, stay, I have my flask."

He poured out some spirit into the cup, and Richard Glaire drank it at a draught, getting up directly after, and shaking his fist at the men on the wall.

"You cowards!" he cried. "I'll be even with you for this."

A yell from the wall, followed by another from the crowd, was the response, when Mr. Selwood turned to Mrs. Glaire.

"If you have any influence with him get him inside somewhere, or we shall have a fresh disturbance."

"Yes, yes," cried the anxious mother, catching her son's arm. "Come into the counting-house, Dick. Go with him, Eve. Take him in, and I'll speak to the men."

"I'm not afraid of the brutal ruffians," cried Richard, shrilly. "I'll not go, I'll——"

Here there was a menacing shout from the wall, and a disposition shown by some of the men to leap down; a movement which had such an effect on Richard Glaire that he allowed his cousin to lead him into a building

some twenty yards away, the vicar's eyes following them as they went.

"I'll speak to the men now," said the little lady. "Banks, you may open the gates; they won't hurt me."

"Not they, ma'am," said the sturdy foreman, looking with admiration at the self-contained little body, as, hastily wiping a tear or two from her eyes, she prepared to encounter the workmen.

Before the gates could be opened, however, an ambassador in the person of Eve Pelly arrived from Richard.

"Not open the gates, child?" exclaimed Mrs. Glaire.

"No, aunt, dear, Richard says it would not be safe for you and me, now the men are so excited."

For a few minutes Mrs. Glaire forgot the deference she always rendered to "my son!" and reading the message in its true light, she exclaimed, angrily—

"Eve, child, go and tell my son that there are the strong lock and bolts on the door that his father had placed there after we were besieged by the workmen ten years ago, and he can lock himself in if he is afraid."

The Reverend Murray Selwood, who heard all this, drew in his breath with a low hissing noise, as if he were in pain, on seeing the action taken by the fair bearer of Richard Glaire's message.

"Aunt, dear," she whispered, clinging to Mrs. Glaire, "don't send me back like that—it will hurt poor Dick's feelings."

"Go and say what you like, then, child," cried Mrs. Glaire, pettishly. "Yes, you are right, Eve; don't say it."

"And you will not open the gates, aunt, dear?"

"Are you afraid of the men, Eve?"

"I, aunt? Oh, no," said the young girl, smiling. "They would not hurt me."

"I should just like to see any one among 'em as would," put in Harry, the big hammerman, giving his shirt sleeve a tighter roll, as if preparing to crush an opponent bent on injuring the little maiden. "We should make him sore, shouldn't we, Tom Podmore, lad?"

"Oh, nobody wouldn't hurt Miss Eve, nor the Missus here," said Tom, gruffly. And then, in answer to a nod

from Banks, the two workmen threw open the great gates, and the yard was filled with the crowd, headed by Sim Slee, who, however, hung back a little—a movement imitated by his followers on seeing that Mrs. Glaire stepped forward to confront them.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS GLAIRE'S SPEECH.

"It's all raight, lads," roared Harry, in a voice of thunder. "Three cheers for Missus Glaire!"

The cheers were given lustily, in spite of Sim Slee, who, mounting on a pile of old metal, began to wave his hands in protestation.

"Stop, stop!" he cried; "it isn't all raight yet. I want to know whether we are to have our rights as British wuckmen, and our just and righteous demands 'corded to us. What I want to know is——"

"Stop a moment, Simeon Slee," said Mrs. Glaire, quickly; and a dead silence fell on the crowd, as her clear, sharp voice was heard. "When I was young, I was taught to look at home first. Now, tell me this—before you began to put matters straight for others, did you make things right at home?"

There was a laugh ran through the crowd at this; but shaken, not daunted, the orator exclaimed—

"Oh, come, that wean't do for me, Mrs. Glaire, ma'am—that's begging of the question. What I want to know is——"

"And what I want to know is," cried Mrs. Glaire, interrupting, "whether, before you came out here leading these men into mischief, you provided your poor wife with a dinner?"

"Hear, hear,"—"That's a good one,"—"Come down, Sim,"—"The Missus is too much for ye!" were amongst the shouts that arose on all sides, mingled with roars of laughter; and Sim Slee's defeat was completed by Harry, the big hammerman, who, incited thereto by Banks, shouted—

"Three more cheers for the Missus!"

These were given, and three more, and three more after that, the workmen forgetting for the time being the object they had in view in the defeat of Simeon Slee, who, vainly trying to make himself heard from the hill of old metal, was finally pulled down and lost in the crowd, while now, in a trembling voice, Mrs. Glaire said—

"My men, I can't tell you how sorry I am to find you fighting against the people who supply you with the work by which you live."

"Not again you, Missus," cried half a dozen.

"Yes, against me and my son—the son of your old master," said Mrs. Glaire, gathering strength as she proceeded.

"You come back agen, and take the wucks, Missus," roared Harry. "Things was all raight then."

"Well said, Harry; well said," cried Tom Podmore, bringing his hand down on the hammerman's shoulder with a tremendous slap. "Well said. Hooray!"

There was a tremendous burst of cheering, and it was some little time before Mrs. Glaire could again make herself heard.

"I cannot do that," she said, "but I will talk matters over with my son, and you shall have fair play, if you will give us fair play in return."

"That's all very well," cried a shrill voice; and Sim Slee and his red waistcoat were once more seen above the heads of the crowd, for, put out of the gates, he had managed to mount the wall; "but what we want to know, as an independent body of sittizens, is——"

"Will some on yo' get shoot of that chap, an' let Missus speak," cried Tom Podmore.

There was a bit of a rush, and Sim Slee disappeared suddenly, as if he had been pulled down by the legs.

"I dont think I need say any more," said Mrs. Glaire, "only to ask you all to come quietly back to work, and I promise you in my son's name——"

"No, no, in yours," cried a dozen.

"Well," said Mrs. Glaire, "in my own and your dead master's name—that you shall all have justice."

"That's all raight, Missus," cried Harry. "Three more cheers for the Missus, lads!"

"Stop!" cried Mrs. Glaire, waving her hands for silence. "Before we go, I think we should one and all thank our new friend here—our new clergyman, for putting a stop to a scene that you as well as I would have regretted to the end of our days."

Mrs. Glaire had got to the end of her powers here, for the mother stepped in as she conjured up the trampled, bleeding form of her only son; her face began to work, the tears streamed down her cheeks, and, trembling and sobbing, she laid both her hands in those of Mr. Selwood, and turned away.

"Raight, Missus," roared Harry, who had certainly partaken of more gills of ale than was good for him. "Raight Missus. Parson hits harder nor any man I ever knowed. Look here, lads, here wur a blob. Three cheers for new parson!"

He pointed laughingly to his brusied forehead with one hand while he waved the other in the air, with the result that a perfect thunder of cheers arose, during which the self-instituted, irrepressible advocate of workmen's rights made another attempt to be heard; but his time had passed, the men were in another temper, and he was met with a cry raised by Tom Podmore.

"Put him oonder the poomp."

Simeon Slee turned and fled, the majority of the crowd after him, and the others slowly filtered away till the yard was empty.

CHAPTER VIII.

DEAR RICHARD.

"TAKE my arm, Mrs. Glaire," said the vicar, gently; and, the excitement past, the overstrung nerves slackened, and the woman reasserted itself, for the doting mother now realised all that had gone, and the risks encountered. Trembling and speechless, she suffered herself to be led into the counting-house, and placed in a chair.

"I—I shall be—better directly," she panted.

"Better!" shrieked her son, who was pacing up and down the room; "better! Mother, it's disgraceful; but

I won't give way a bit—not an inch. I'll bring the scoundrels to reason. I'll——"

"Dick, dear Dick, don't. See how ill poor aunt is," whispered Eve.

"I don't care," said the young man, furiously. "I won't have it. I'll——"

"Will you kindly get a glass of water for your mother, Mr. Glaire?" said the vicar, as he half held up the trembling woman in her chair, and strove hard to keep the disgust he felt from showing in his face—"I am afraid she will faint."

"Curse the water! No," roared Richard. "I won't have it—I—I say I won't have it; and who the devil are you, that you should come poking your nose into our business? You'll soon find that Dumford is not the place for a meddling parson to do as he likes."

"Dick!" shrieked Eve; and she tried to lay a hand upon his lips.

"Hold your tongue, Eve! Am I master here, or not?" cried Richard Glaire. "I won't have a parcel of women meddling in my affairs, nor any kind of old woman," he continued, disdainfully glancing at the vicar.

There was a slight accession of colour in Murray Selwood's face, but he paid no further heed to the young man's words, while, with her face crimson with shame, Eve bent over her aunt, trying to restore her, for she was indeed half fainting; and the cold clammy dew stood upon her forehead.

"Here's a mug o' watter, sir," said the rough, sturdy voice of Joe Banks, as he filled one from a shelf; and then he threw open a couple of windows to let the air blow in more freely.

"Don't let anybody here think I'm a child," continued Richard Glaire, who, the danger passed, was now white with passion; "and don't let anybody here, mother or foreman, or stranger, think I'm a man to be played with."

"There's nobody thinks nothing at all, my lad," said Joe Banks, sharply, "only that if the parson there hadn't come on as he did, you'd have been a pretty figure by this time, one as would ha' made your poor moother shoother again."

"Hold your tongue, sir; how dare you speak to me like that!" roared Richard.

"How dare I speak to you like that, my lad?" said the foreman, smiling. "Well, because I've been like a sort of second father to you in the works, and if you'd listened to me, instead of being so arbitrary, there wouldn't ha' been this row."

"You insolent——"

"Oh yes, all raight, Master Richard, all raight," said the foreman, bluffly.

"Dick, dear Dick," whispered Eve, clinging to his arm; but he shook her off.

"Hold your tongue, will you!" he shrieked. "Look here, you Banks," he cried, "if you dare to speak to me like that I'll discharge you, I will, for an example."

Banks laughed, and followed the raving man to the other end of the great counting-house to whisper—

"No you wean't, lad, not you."

Richard started, and turned of a sickly hue as he confronted the sturdy old foreman.

"Think I didn't know you, my lad, eh?" he whispered; and driving his elbow at the same time into the young man's chest, he puckered up his face, and gave him a knowing smile. "No, you wean't start me, Richard Glaire, I know. But I say, my lad, don't be so hard on the poor lass there, your cousin."

"Will you hold your tongue?" gasped Richard. "They'll hear you."

"Well, what if they do?" said the sturdy old fellow. "Let 'em. There's nowt to be ashamed on. But there, you're popped now, and no wonder. Get you home with your moother."

"But I can't go through the streets."

"Yes, you can; nobody 'll say a word to you now. Get her home, lad; get her home."

It was good advice, but Richard Glaire would not take it, and his mother gladly availed herself of the vicar's arm.

"You'll come home now, Richard," said Mrs. Glaire, feebly; and she looked uneasily from her son to the foreman, as she recalled their conversation in the garden, and felt unwilling to leave them alone together.

"I shall come home when the streets are safe," said Richard, haughtily. "They are safe enough for you, but I'm not going to subject myself to another attack from a set of brute beasts."

"I don't think you have anything to fear now," said the vicar, quietly.

"Who said I was afraid?" snarled Richard, facing sharply round, and paying no heed to the remonstrant looks of cousin and mother. "I should think I know Dumford better than you, and when to go and when to stay."

The young men's eyes met for a moment, and Richard Glaire's shifty gaze sank before the calm, manly look of the man who had so bravely interposed on his behalf.

"Curse him! I hate him," Richard said in his heart. "He's brave and strong, and big and manly, and he does nothing but degrade me before Eve. I hate him—I hate him."

"What a contemptible cad he is," said Murray Selwood in his heart; "and yet he must have his good points, or that sweet girl would not love him as she evidently does. Poor girl, poor girl! But there: it is not fair to judge him now."

"Of course, you must know best, Mr. Glaire," he said aloud, "for I am quite a stranger. I will see your mother and cousin safely home, and I hope next time we shall have a more pleasant meeting. You are put out now, and no wonder. Good-bye."

He held out his hand with a frank, pleasant smile upon his countenance, and the two women and the foreman looked curiously on as Richard shrank away, and with a childish gesture thrust his hand behind him. But it was of no use, that firm, unblenching eye seemed to master him, the strong, brown muscular hand remained outstretched, and, in spite of himself, the young man felt drawn towards it, and fighting mentally against the influence the while, he ended by impatiently placing his own limp, damp fingers within it, and letting them lie there a moment before snatching them away.

Directly after, leaning on the vicar's arm, and with Eve on her other side, Mrs. Glaire was being led through

the knots of people still hanging about the streets. There was no attempt at molestation, and once or twice a faint cheer rose; but Mr. Selwood was fully aware of the amount of attention they drew from door and window, for the Dumford people were not at all bashful as to staring or remark.

At last the awkward steps were reached, and after supporting Mrs. Glaire to a couch, the new vicar turned to go, followed to the door by Eve.

"Good-bye, and thank you—so much, Mr. Selwood," she said, pressing his hand warmly. "I did not think we should meet again so soon. And, Mr. Selwood——"

She stopped short, looking up at him timidly.

"Yes," he said, smiling. "Don't be afraid to speak; we are not strangers now."

"No, no; I know that," she cried, eagerly. "I was only going to say—to say—don't judge dear Richard harshly from what you saw this morning. He was excited and hurt."

"Of course, of course," said the vicar, pressing the little hand he held in both his. "How could any one judge a man harshly at such a time? Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

"And with such a little ministering angel to intrecede for him," muttered the vicar, as the door closed. "Heigho! these things are a mystery, and it is as well that they should be, or I don't know what would become of poor erring man."

CHAPTER IX.

AN ENLIGHTENED ENGLISHMAN.

On reaching the vicarage, Murray Selwood found one of the rooms made bright and comfortable with the furniture that had been sent in, and the table spread ready for a composite meal, half breakfast, half dinner, with a dash in it of country tea.

Everything was scrupulously clean, and Mrs. Slee was bustling about, not looking quite so wan and unsociable as when he saw her first.

"I've scratted a few things together," she said, acidly,

"and you must mak' shift till I've had more time. Will you have the pot in now? I put the bacon down before the fire when I saw you coming. But, lord, man, what have ye been doin' to your hand?"

"Only bruised it a bit: knocked the skin off," said Mr. Selwood, smiling.

"Don't tell me," said Mrs. Slee, sharply. "You've been faighting."

"Well, I knocked a man down, if you call that fighting," said the vicar, smiling, as he saw Mrs. Slee hurriedly produce a basin, water, and a coarse brown, but very clean, towel, with which she proceeded to bathe his bleeding hand.

"Oh, it's nothing," he said, as he took out his pocket-book. "You'll find scissors and some sticking-plaister in there."

"I don't want no sticking-plaister," she said, taking a phial of some brown liquid from inside a common ornament. "This'll cure it directly."

"And what may this be?" said the vicar, smiling, as he saw his leech shake the bottle, and well soak a small piece of rag in the liquid.

"Rag Jack's oil," said Mrs. Slee, pursing up her lips, and then anointing and tying up the injured hand. "It cures everything."

The vicar nodded, not being without a little faith in homely country simples; and then the rag was neatly sewed on, and an old glove cut so as to cover the unsightly bandage.

"Did they upset you?" she then queried.

"Well, no," he said; and he briefly related what had taken place. "By the way, I hope that gentleman in the red waistcoat is no relation of yours. Is he?"

"Is he?" retorted Mrs. Slee, viciously dabbing down a dish of tempting bacon, with some golden eggs, beside the crisp brown loaf and yellow butter. "Is he, indeed! He's my master."

Mrs. Slee hurried out of the room, but came back directly after.

"You've no spoons," she said, sharply; and then making a dive through her thin, shabby dress, she searched for

some time for a pocket-hole, and then plunging her arm in right to the shoulder, she brought out a packet tied in a bit of calico. This being undone displayed a paper, and within this another paper was set free. Carefully folded, and fitted into one another, within this were half a dozen very small-sized, old fashioned silver tea-spoons, blackened with tarnish.

"They are quite clean," grumbled Mrs. Slee, giving a couple of them a rub. "They were my grandmother's, and she gave 'em to me when I was married—worse luck. I keep 'em there so as they shan't be drunk. He did swallow the sugar-tongs."

"Does your husband drink, then?" said Mr. Selwood, quietly.

"Is there anything he don't do as he oughtn't since they turned him out of the plan?" said the woman, angrily. "There, don't you talk to me about him; it makes me wild when I don't want to be.

She hurried out of the room again, shutting the door as loudly as she possibly could without its being called a bang; and then hunger drove everything else out of the young vicar's mind, even the face of Eve Pelly, and—a minor consideration—his bruised hand.

"A queer set of people indeed," he said, as he progressed with his hearty meal. "What capital bread, though. That butter's delicious. Hah!" he ejaculated, helping himself to another egg and a pinky brown piece of bacon; "if there is any fault in these eggs they are too fresh. By Sampson, I must tell Mrs. Slee to secure some more of this bacon."

Ten minutes later he was playing with the last cup of tea, and indulging it with more than its normal proportions of sugar and milk, for the calm feeling of satisfaction which steals over a hearty man after a meal—a man who looks upon digestion as a dictionary word, nothing more—had set in, and Murray Selwood was thinking about his new position in life.

"Well, I suppose I shall get used to it—in time. There must be a few friends to be made. Hallo!"

The ejaculation was caused by some one noisily entering the adjoining room with—

"Now then, what hev you got to yeat?"

"Nowt," was the reply.

The voices were both familiar, for in the first the vicar recognised that of the man in the red waistcoat—"My master," as Mrs. Slee called him.

"You've been cooking something," he continued loudly.

"Yes. The parson's come, and it's his brakfast."

"Brakfast at this time o' day? Oh, then, it's him as I see up at foundry wi' them Glaires."

"Don't talk so loud, or he'll hear you," said Mrs. Slee, sharply.

"Let him. Let him hear me, and let him know that there's a free, enlightened Englishman beneath the same roof. Let him know that there's one here breathing the free—free light—breath of heaven here. A man too humble to call himself a paytriot, but who feels like one, and moans over the sufferings of his down-trampled brothers."

"I tell you he'll hear you directly, and we shall have to go."

"Let him hear me," shouted Simeon, "and let him drive us out—drive us into the free air of heaven. It 'll only be a new specimint of the bloated priesthood trampling down and gloating over the sufferings of the poor. Who's he—a coming down here with his cassicks and gowns to read and riot on his five hundred a year in a house like this, when a hard-working body of brothers on the local plan can preach wi'out having it written down, and wi'out cassicks and gowns, and get nothing for it but glory! Let him hear me."

"Thou fulsome! hold thy stupid tongue," cried Mrs. Slee.

"Never!" exclaimed Simeon, who counted this his opportunity after being baffled in the forenoon. "I'll be trampled on no more by any bloated oligarch of a priest, or master. I've been a slave too—too long. I'm starving now, but what then? I can be a martyr to a holy cause—the 'oly cause of freedom. Let him riot in his food and raiment—let him turn us out, and some day—some day—I say some day——"

Mr. Slee paused in his oratory, for his wife had clapped her hand over his mouth; but just then the door opened, and the vicar stood in the opening.

Mrs. Slee dropped her hand, while Simeon thrust his right into his breast, orator fashion, and faced the newcomer with inborn dignity.

"How do, Mr. Slee?" said the vicar, quietly. "We met before this morning. I merely came to say that I cannot help hearing every word that is spoken in this room."

"The words that I said—" began Simeon.

"And," continued the vicar, "I have quite done, if you will clear away, Mrs. Slee. I am going to see about a few more necessaries for the place, and to look out for a gardener, unless your husband likes the job."

"Garden!" said Simeon; "I dig!"

"I often do," said the vicar, coolly. It's very healthy work. Famous for the appetite. By the way, Mr. Slee, I heard you say you were hungry. Mrs. Slee, pray don't save anything on the table; you are quite welcome."

He walked out of the place, and Mrs. Slee, who, poor women, looked ravenously hungry, hastened to spread their own table.

"That for you," said Simeon, snapping his fingers after the retreating form. "I care that for you—a bloated priest. Of course, we're to eat his husks—a swine—his leavings. No; I'll rather starve than be treated so."

"Howd thy silly tongue, thou fulsome!" exclaimed Mrs. Slee, "and thank the Lord there is something sent for thee. You talk like that! Oh, Sim, Sim, if ever there was a shack, it's thou."

"Mebbe I am, mebbe I'm not," said Sim, as he looked curiously on, while his wife filled up the steaming teapot, put the half dish of bacon down to warm, and then proceeded to cut some thick slices of bread and butter.

Sim turned his eyes away and tried to look out of the window, but those thick slices, with the holes well filled with butter, were magnetic, and drew his eyes back again.

"I tell ye what, woman," he began, wrenching his eyes away, "that the day is coming when the British wuckman will tear himself from under the despot's heel."

"There, do hold thee clat, and—there, yeat that."

Mrs. Slee thrust a great slice of the tempting bread and butter into her husband's hand, and his fingers clutched it fiercely.

"Yeat that—yeat that," he cried. "Yeat the bread of a brutal, Church-established tyrant? Yeat the husks of his leavings? Never! I'd sooner—sooner—sooner—sooner—Yah!"

Mr. Simeon Slee's words came more and more slowly, as he prepared to dash the bread and butter down; but as his eyes rested upon the slice, he hesitated, and as he hesitated he fell, for the temptation was too great for the hungry hero. He uttered a kind of snarling ejaculation, and then treating the bread as if it were an enemy, he bit out of it a great semicircle, while throwing himself into a chair, he sat and ate slice after slice with bacon, in silence, washing all down with cups of tea.

Mr. Slee stirred his tea with a fork-handle, for it was noticeable that the silver teaspoons had disappeared—a line of procedure adopted by Sim as soon as his hunger was appeased, for he had certain meetings of his brotherhood to attend, so he told his wife; and he did not return till late, his coming being announced by sundry stumbles in the passage, and a peculiar thickness of utterance, due doubtless to the exhaustion consequent upon many patriotic utterances at the hostelry known as the Bull for short—the Bull and Cucumber, in fact.

Seekers for derivations of signs had puzzled themselves a good deal over the connection between a bull and that familiar gourd of the *cucurbitaceæ* known as a cucumber. It is perhaps needless to add that the learned were baffled, but the incongruity was never noticed by the people of Dumford, and as their pronunciation of the sign was the Bull and Cowcumber, the connection did not sound at all out of place.

Mr. Selwood heard Sim return, and lay for some time listening to his patriotic utterances—fragments, in fact, of the speech he had delivered at the meeting—and it became very evident to the new occupant of the vicarage that life with Mr. Simeon Slee beneath his roof would not be very pleasant.

"I don't like the idea of turning out the poor woman, either," he said to himself, as he lay turning from side to side, courting the rest that would not come.

"I've been a bit excited to-day, I suppose," he muttered; and then he tried all the known recipes short of drugs for obtaining rest, from saying a speech backwards to getting out of bed and brushing his hair.

But sleep would not come till close upon morning, for that face before him was the sweet appealing face of Eve Pelly, and in the stillness of the night he seemed to be hearing her words again and again—"Don't judge dear Richard harshly from what you saw this morning."

"Dear Richard, dear Richard, dear Richard"—he found himself repeating over and over again. "And she loves him, and believes in him. He is everything to her, and if she found out that he was a scoundrel it would break her heart."

"And set her free," something in the corner of his own seemed to whisper; and he started, and sat up in bed with the perspiration standing on his brow.

"Am I sane? Am I in my right senses?" he said, feeling his pulse and counting its beats. "I must be a little out of tone. Humph! I'll have such a walk to-morrow! Bah! it's the excitement of coming down here, and it has been rather a lively day."

He punched and turned his pillow fiercely, threw himself down, and closed his eyes once more, shutting out the dimly-seen lattice window, with its fringe of ivy leaves; but as he did so there was Eve Pelly's face again, and that gentle look which accompanied the appealing curve of her lips, as she said, "Don't judge dear Richard harshly."

The would-be sleeper started up in bed again, and sat there feeling hot and feverish for some time.

"Look here, Murray, dear boy," he said at last. "You are down here for a great purpose. You have here in your charge some four thousand souls to teach and tend, and help on in life's course. Don't fidget, my boy. I'm not going to preach, only to say a few words to the point. Now, look here: You are the spiritual head of the parish; you have your Master's work to do. In short,

you are a teacher. Now mind this, a teacher who cannot govern himself is a broken reed. Are you a broken reed?"

This was all said in a low voice, and then for a few moments there was silence in the room, to be broken by the young man saying in a somewhat louder voice in answer to his own words:

"I hope not."

"Good," he continued, in the former tone, "I like that: it sounds humble and hopeful. Now look here, you will see a great deal of what goes on in this place. In fact, you have seen a good deal already, and you have learned what is the state of affairs with one of the principal families. You have heard that Richard Glaire is engaged to his cousin; that the said cousin loves him; and that this weak young man is playing fast and loose."

"Yes."

"Good. Well, your duty is plain; the young fellow doubtless has his good points. Make him your friend, and improve them—for her sake—gain an influence over him. You can, and you will, Murray Selwood. Yours may be a hard duty, but you must do it."

"Yes, verily, and by God's help so I will."

"Good. Now you may go to sleep."

After this he lay down, and by a strange exercise of will, and in the belief that he was going to conquer a feeling absolutely new to him, he fell asleep directly.

But it was no peaceful rest such as generally came to his pillow, for he lay tossing in dreams of Eve Pelly turning to him constantly for help from some great trouble that was ever pursuing her—a danger that he could not avert. Then Richard Glaire had him by the throat, charging him with robbing him of his love; and then he was engaged in a mad struggle with the young man, holding him over a gulf to hurl him in, incited thereto by the young workman. Then once more Eve Pelly's appealing face was before him, praying him to spare dear Richard, the man she loved, and then,——

"Thank God, it's morning!" he exclaimed, waking with a start, to consult his watch, and finding it was half-past six.

CHAPTER X.

SIM SLEE BUSY.

BANKS, the foreman, stayed late at the foundry on the night of the disturbance. His master remained in the counting-house smoking cigars till he was very white and ill, feelings which he attributed to the assault made upon him that day—a very sudden one by the way, and one which had arisen, as has been intimated, on account of a rather unfair reduction that had been made in the rate of pay.

But this was not all, for the fact was, that after being left to go on in its quiet, old-fashioned way for years, probably from its insignificance, Dumford had suddenly been leavened by Sim Slee with a peculiar version of his own of the trades-union doctrines of some of the larger towns—doctrines which he had altered to suit his own ends.

Hence arose a society which was the pride of Sim Slee, and known amongst the workmen as the Brotherhood. Meetings were held regularly, speeches made, and Simeon Slee, who heretofore had confined himself to idleness, drink, and local preaching, till expelled as a disgrace to the plan, became a shining light in the brotherhood, on account of what the more quiet workmen called his power of putting things, though the greater part held aloof, from the contempt in which this leader was held.

In previous days, with one or two exceptions, the word of the master of the works had been law, and wages were raised or lowered as trade flourished or fell, with nothing more than a few murmurs; but now times were altered, men had begun to think for themselves, and the behaviour of Richard Glaire had grown so arbitrary and unjust that the consequence was the riot we have seen.

Richard Glaire was about as unsuitable a person as it is possible to imagine to have such a responsibility as the management of a couple of hundred men; but he did not believe this, and he sat, after the departure of his mother, nursing his wrongs, and making plans for the punishment of his workmen.

At one time he was for having the assistance of the military, but as he cooled down he was obliged to acknowledge that his request would be ridiculed.

Then he determined on getting summonses against about twenty of the ringleaders, whom he meant to discharge.

Once he called Banks, and asked him what it would be best to do.

"Put the wage right again," said the foreman.

Whereupon Richard Glaire turned upon him in a burst of childish passion, and declared that he was in a league with the scoundrels who had assaulted him.

"There, I shall go till you've had time to cool down," said Banks, grimly. "Your metal's hot, Master Richard, and it wean't be raight again till you've had a night's rest."

Richard made no reply, but sat biting his lips and making plans till dusk, when he cautiously stole out of the building by a side door, of which he alone had the key.

Banks stayed on for another couple of hours, plodding about the building, examining doors, the extinct forges and furnaces, looking at the bands of the huge lathes, and displaying a curious kind of energy, as by means of a small bull's-eye lantern he peered in and out of all sorts of out-of-the-way places.

"There's no knowing what games Master Sim might try on," he remarked to himself; "blowings up and cutting bands, and putting powther in the furnace holes; he's shack enew for ought, and I dessay some on 'em will be stupid enough to side wi' him. What's that?"

He stopped and listened, for it seemed to him that he had heard a noise below him in the ground floor.

The sound was not repeated, so he went on cautiously through the great black workshop, with its weird assemblage of shafts, cranks, and bands, looking, in the fitful gleams cast by the lantern, like a torture-chamber in the fabled Pandemonium.

A stranger would have tripped and fallen a dozen times over the metal-cumbered floor; but every inch and every piece of machinery was so familiar to the foreman

that he could have gone about the place blindfold, even as he did once or twice in the dark when he closed his bull's-eye lantern, thinking he heard a noise.

All seemed right in this workshop, so he descended to the foundry, going over it and amongst the furnaces, now growing cold. Then he threaded his way amongst the sunken moulds for castings; looked up at the cranes, paused before the massive crucibles used for melting bell-metal or ingots for the great steel bells, and ended by stopping again to listen.

"I'll sweer I heerd a noise," he muttered, taking a short constable's staff from his pocket, and twisting its stout leather thong round his wrist. "It will be strange awkward for somebody if I find him playing any of his tricks here."

He went cautiously on tip-toe in the direction from which the noise had seemed to come, going up a short ladder to a raised portion of the foundry, which formed an open floor where lighter work was done.

He advanced very cautiously in the dark, holding his staff ready to deliver a blow, or guard his head, and the next minute there was the sound of some tool being moved on a bench, and then something alighted at his feet, setting up a soft purring and beginning to rub up against his legs.

"Why, Tommy," he said, "you scar'd me, my boy. It was you, was it? After rats, eh, Tommy? Poor old puss, then."

He turned on his lantern, took a good look round, and then, apparently satisfied, he pulled out an old-fashioned silver watch and consulted its face.

"Eight o'clock, eh? Why, they'll think at home that I'm lost."

As he spoke he made his light play round for a few minutes, and then, apparently satisfied, he put it out, placed the lamp on a shelf, and went out and across the yard to a kind of lodge, where a man was waiting to take the duty of the watchman for the night.

"All raight, Mester Banks?"

"All right, Rolf," was the reply. "I've been all round."

Directly after the old foreman was on his way homeward, but he had hardly taken a dozen strides down the lane under the wall, before the head of Simeon Slee was cautiously raised above the edge of one of the great crucibles, or melting-pots, and then for a time he remained motionless.

"You're a clever one, Joe Banks, you are," he said at last, as he raised himself up and sat on the edge of the great pot. "You can find out everything, yow can; you can trample on the raights of the British wucking-man, and get the independent spirits discharged, eh? But you're one of the ungodly bitter ones, and you must be smitten wherever you can. Let's see how the wuck 'll go on to-morrow."

The speaker threw his legs over the side, and then paused to dust his trousers and his coat before proceeding further.

"It's hot lying in hiding there," he muttered, pulling off his coat and rolling up his sleeves. "I have to toil and moil like a slave for the cause."

His next proceeding was to open a great clasp knife and try its edge, which was keen as that of a razor; and then, armed with this, and quite as much at home in the works as the foreman, he went about with lithe steps as cautious as a cat, and, cutting through the bands that connected the wheels of the lathes with the great shaft that set them in motion, he dragged them down and piled them together till he had collected a goodly heap.

This was not accomplished all at once, and with ease, for, setting aside the watchfulness with which the task had to be done, and the care to ensure silence, the bands were heavy, hard to cut, and they had to be borne some distance. Altogether it took Sim Slee a good hour's arduous labour, and he perspired profusely. In fact, it was his habit to take more pains to achieve a bad end than would have sufficed to get a good living twice over.

"Phew! it's hot," he muttered in one of his pauses, during which he ran to the nearest door and listened. "What a slave I am to the cause."

Then he chuckled and laughed over the mischief he had

done, and ended by laboriously dragging all the great leather bands and straps to the uncovered hole of a furnace, down which he dropped them, so that they fell far back from the mouth below, which opened on the stoke-hole; and he knew that the chances were ten to one that if the present heat did not destroy them, a fire would be lit by the careless stokers, and the bands consumed before they were missed, as, if business were resumed on the following day, the firemen would be there long before the ordinary workers.

"Theer," said Sim, when he had finished, "I wonder what Joe Banks would say now if he knew o' this?"

He resumed his coat, out of the pocket of which he took a piece of strong line, some fifteen feet long, and walked cautiously, listening the while, towards one of the windows which looked down on the lane, one side of which was formed by the works and the wall of the yard, and from which the little door before mentioned gave access to the proprietor's private room in the counting-house.

Sim Slee had entered by this window, being a light, active man, and he was about to descend from it, and make his escape by hitching the strong light steel hook attached to the end of his rope to the sill, just as he had entered by throwing it up till it caught, it being so constructed that a sharp wave sent along the slackened rope would set it free. But before descending Sim stood, rope in hand, listening, watched by a cat at a respectable distance, that sage black animal being evidently impressed with the fact that the intruder in the works was wonderfully rat-like in his actions.

Tommy did not approach him, nor yet purr, but crouched there watching while Sim stood with one ear close to the window, then sharply turned his head and thrust it out into the night air, drew it back again as sharply, and then cautiously thrust it out once more, so that unseen he could see and listen to what went on below.

For there were two figures just below the opening, and as Sim listened, holding his breath, one of them exclaimed:

"I won't, I won't, Mr. Richard, and you've no business to ask me."

"*Mr.* Richard," said the other, reproachfully; "I thought it was to be Dick—your own Dick."

"Oh, don't—don't—don't talk like that," sobbed the other. "Oh, I wish I really, really knew whether you meant it all."

"Meant it all, Daisy! how can you be so cruel, when you know how dearly I love you? But come into the counting-house, and we can sit there and talk."

"I can't—I won't!" said Daisy; "and you know you oughtn't to ask me, Mr. Richard. What would father say if he were to hear of it?"

"Father would only be too pleased," whispered the young man, "for he believes in me, if you don't, Daisy. He'd like you to be my own beautiful darling little wife, that I should make a lady."

"But, do you really, really mean it, Mr. Richard?" said Daisy, with a hysterical sob.

"'Really mean it! Mr. Richard!'" said the young fellow, reproachfully. "Oh, Daisy, have you so mean an opinion of me? Do you take me for a contemptible liar?"

"Oh no, no, no," sobbed the girl; "but they say—I always thought—I believed that you were engaged to Miss Eve."

"A poor puny thing," said Richard, in a contemptuous tone; "and besides, she's my cousin."

"But she thinks you love her," said Daisy.

"Poor thing!" laughed Richard.

"And I believe you love her."

"Indeed I don't, nor anybody else but you, you beautiful little rosebud. Oh, Daisy, Daisy, how can you be so cruel!"

"I'm not, I'm not cruel," sobbed poor Daisy; "but I want to do what's right."

"Of course," whispered Richard. "But come along, let's go in the counting-house—to my room—it's safer there."

"I won't, I won't," cried Daisy, indignantly. "At such a time of night, too! You oughtn't to ask me."

"I only asked you for your own sake," said Richard, "because people might talk if they saw you with me here."

"Oh yes," sobbed Daisy; "and they would. I must go."

"Stop a moment," said Richard, catching her wrist. "Perhaps, too, it was a little for my own sake, because the men are so furious against me."

"Oh yes, I heard," cried Daisy, with her voice shaking; "but they did not hurt you to-day?"

"Not hurt me!" said Richard. "Why, they nearly killed me."

"No, no," sobbed Daisy.

"But they did; and they would if I hadn't been rescued."

Daisy suppressed a hysterical cry, and Richard passed his arm round her little waist, and drew her to him.

"Then you do love me a little, Daisy?" he whispered.

"No, no, I don't think I do," sobbed the girl, without however trying to get away. "I believe you were going to meet Miss Eve this morning, and were disappointed because I was there."

"Indeed I was not," said Richard. "But I'm sure you were expecting to see that great hulking hound, Tom Podmore."

"That I was not," cried Daisy, impetuously; "and I won't have you speak like that of poor Tom, for I've behaved very badly to him, and he's a good—good, worthy fellow."

"'Poor Tom!'" said Richard, with a sigh. "Ah, Daisy, Daisy."

"Don't, Mr. Richard, please," sobbed Daisy, who was crying bitterly.

"'Poor Tom—Mr. Richard,'" said the young man, as if speaking to himself.

"Don't, don't, Mr. Richard, please."

"'Mr. Richard!'"

"Well, Dick, then. But there, I must go now."

"Not just now, darling Daisy," whispered Richard, passionately. "Come with me—here we are close by the door."

"No, no, indeed I will not," cried Daisy, firmly.

"Not when I tell you it isn't safe for me to be in the streets at night, for fear some ruffian should knock out my brains?"

"Oh, Dick, dear Dick, don't say so."

"But I'm obliged to," he said, trying to draw her along; but she still resisted.

"I wouldn't have you hurt for the world," she sobbed; "but, Richard—Dick, do you really, really love me as much as you have said?"

"Ten thousand times more, my darling, or I shouldn't have been running horrible risks to-night to keep my appointment with you."

"And you—you want to make me your wife, Richard—to share everything with you?"

"You know I do, darling," he cried, in a low, hoarse whisper.

"Then, Dick, dear, it wouldn't be proper respect to your future wife to take me there to your works at this time of night," said the girl, simply, as she clung to him.

"Not when the streets are unsafe?" he cried.

"Let's part now, directly," said Daisy. "I would sooner die than any one should hurt you, Richard; but you'd never respect your wife if she had no respect for herself. Good night, Richard."

"There, I was right," he cried, petulantly, as he snatched himself away. "You do still care for Tom."

"No, no, Dick, dear Dick. I don't a bit," sobbed the girl. "Don't, pray don't speak to me like that."

"Then will you come with me—only because it isn't safe here?" whispered Richard.

"No, no," sobbed the girl, firmly, "I can't do that, and if you loved me as you said, you wouldn't ask me."

"Bah!" ejaculated Richard, angrily. "Go to your dirty, grimy lout of a lover, then;" and as the girl clung to him he thrust her rudely away.

Sim Slee, more rat-like than ever, had been rubbing his hands together with delight, as he looked down at the dimly-seen figures, and overheard every word.

"There'll be a faight, and Dicky Glaire will be

bunched about strangely," muttered Sim, as Daisy gave a faint scream, for a figure strode out of the darkness.

"She wouldn't have far to go," said the figure, hoarsely.

"Tom!" cried Daisy, shrinking to the wall.

"Yes, it's Tom, sure enew," said the new-comer. "Daisy Banks, it's time thou wast at home, and I'm goin' to see thee theer."

"How dare you interfere, you insolent scoundrel!" cried Richard, striding forward; but he stopped short as Tom drew himself up.

"Look ye here, Richard Glaire—Mester Richard Glaire," said Tom, hoarsely, "I'm goin' to tak' Daisy Banks home to her father wi'out touching of you; but if you try to stop me, I'll finish the job as I stopped them lads from doing this morning. Now go home while you're raight, for it wean't be safe to come a step nigher."

Richard Glaire drew back, while the young fellow took Daisy by the wrist, and drew her arm through his own, striding off directly, but stopping as Richard cried:

"You cowardly eavesdropper; you heard every word."

"Just about," said Tom, coolly; "I come to tak' care o' Daisy here; and if she'd said 'Yes,' by the time yow'd got the key of your private door theer, I should ha' knocked thee down and had my foot o' thee handsome face, Mester."

He strode off, Daisy having hard work to keep up with him, sobbing the while, till they were near her home, when she made an effort to cease crying, wiped her eyes, and broke the silence.

"Did—did you hear what I said, Tom?" she whispered.

"Ivery word, lass, but I only recollect one thing."

"What was that?"

"That thou did'st not love me a bit."

Daisy gave a sob.

"You musn't mind, Tom," she said, in a low voice, "for I'm a bad, wretched girl."

"I should spoil the face of any man who said so to me," he said, passionately; and then he relapsed into his quiet moody manner.

"There's plenty of better girls than me, Tom, will be glad to love you," she said.

"Yes," he said, softly, "plenty;" and then with a simple pathos he continued bitterly, "and I've got plenty more hearts to give i' place o' the one as you've 'bout broke."

Daisy's breath came with a catch, and they went on in silence for a time—a silence that the girl herself broke.

"Tom," she said, hoarsely, and he gave quite a start. "Tom, are you going to tell mother and father what you've heard and seen?"

"No, lass," he said, sadly, "I'm not o' that sort. I came to try and take care o' thee, not as I've any call to now. Thou must go thy own gate, for wi' such as thou fathers and mothers can do nowt. If Dick Glaire marries thee, I hope thoul't be happy. If he deceives thee——"

"What, Tom?" whispered the girl, in an awe-stricken tone, for her companion was silent.

"I shall murder him, and be hung out of my misery," said Tom. "There's your door, lass. Go in."

He waited till the door closed upon her, and then strode off into the darkness.

Meanwhile Sim Slee leaned cautiously from the window watching Richard, who stood now just beneath him, grinding his teeth with impotent rage as he saw Daisy disappear.

"Why didn't that fool smash the lungeing villain!" said Slee to himself; and then he leaned a little further out.

"I'd like to drop one of these ingots on his head, only it would be mean—Yah! go on, you tyrant and oppressor and robber of the poor, and—oh, my! what a lark!" he said, drawing in his head as Richard Glaire disappeared, when he threw himself on the floor, hugging himself and rolling about in ecstasy, while the cat on the neighbouring lathe set up its back, swelled its tail, and stared at him with dilated eyes.

"Here's a lark!" said Sim again. "Why, we shall get owd Joe Banks over to our side. Oh yes, of course he sides with the mesters, he does. He hates trade unions, he does. He says my brotherhood's humbug, and he's too true to his master to side wi' such as me. Ho, ho, ho! I shall hev you, Joe Banks, and you'll bring the rest. I

shall hev' you ; and if you ain't enrolled at the Bull before a month's out, my name ain't Simeon Slee."

"Let me see," said Sim, sitting up sedately and brushing the dirt from his coat, "I've to speak at Churley o' Tuesday. I'll let 'em have it about suthing as 'll fit exact to the case. An' it's a wonderful power is speech. Hey ! that it is."

He looked out and listened for a few minutes, and then, all being apparently clear, he placed his knee on the window-sill, slid down the rope, gave it a jerk which set the hook free, caught it nimbly, and rolling the line up, went on preening and brushing himself still like a rat till he reached the Bull and Cucumber, where he was received by the party assembled with a good deal of pot-rattling on the table.

It fell to him, as has been intimated, to make a speech or two that night, for the affairs of the day were largely discussed ; and in the course of his delivery he named no names, he said, leastwise he did not say it weer, nor he didn't say it weern't Joe Banks, foreman at the foundry, but what he did say was that there was more unlikely things on the cards than for a certain person to jine their ranks, and become one of a brotherhood of which every man there was proud.

"Well, I don't know so much about that, Sim Slee," said one of the men. "This here don't seem like the societies that we hear on."

"What do you mean ? " said Sim.

"Mean ! Why, as instead of our being joined sensible like to get what's reasonable fro' the master, we come here to hear thee spout."

"That's your ignorance, Peter Thorndike," said Sim. "Yow'd like to be head man pr'haps, and tak' the lead."

"Nay," said the man, "I want to tak' no leads, for I can't talk like thee ; but I want what's sensible and raight for both sides, and I don't see as we're agoing to get it by calling ourselves brothers, and takking oaths, and listening to so much o' thy blather."

"Peter Thorndike," said Sim, folding his arms like an image of Napoleon at St. Helena, "thou'rt only a child yet, and hast much to learn. Don't I tell thee as afore

long Joe Banks 'll be over on our side, and a great time coming for Dicky Glaire?"

"Yes, you telled me," growled the man, "but I don't know as I believe it. I wants what's fair, and that's what we all wants, eh, lads?"

"Yes, yes," chorused the others.

"Then you shall have it," said Sim, raising one hand to speak.

"I' words," said Thorndike, "and they don't make owt to yeat. Sim Slee, your brotherhood's all a sham."

CHAPTER XI.

MRS. GLAIRE'S VICTORY.

TEA had been waiting for some time at the house before Richard Glaire made his appearance—for he had of late insisted upon over-setting the old-fashioned homely customs of his boyhood, and dined late.

The drawing-room looked pleasant, for it was well-lighted; the tea-service was bright and handsome; and Eve's hand was visible in many places about the room, where flowers were prettily arranged in vases; in the handsomely-worked cosy which covered the tea-pot; and in the various pieces of needlework that had grown from her leisure time.

Mrs. Glaire, still somewhat upset by the excitement of the day, was lying on a couch, with her face screened from the lamp, whose soft light fell upon Eve as she sat trying to read, but with her thoughts wandering far away. In fact, from time to time she glanced towards the window, and at every sound a bright look of pleasure took that of the anxiety depicted upon her sweet young face.

Then the animation would die out, and she sat apparently listening.

A sigh from the couch aroused her; and, crossing the room, she bent down to tenderly stroke the grey curls back from Mrs. Glaire's forehead before kissing her.

"Poor aunty," she cooed; "she does want her tea so badly. Let me give you one—just one little cup."

"No, Eve," said Mrs. Glaire, "I'll wait till Richard comes."

"Where can he be?" said Eve, anxiously. "How late he is." Then, seeing how her words had impressed her aunt, she hastened to add: "Don't fidget, aunt, dear; he's only stopping to have a cigar. He'll soon be here."

"Eve, my child," said Mrs. Glaire, who had been brooding over a trouble other than that which had disturbed her during the day; "bring a stool and sit down by me."

Eve hastened to obey, and, drawing the young girl's head down to her breast, Mrs. Glaire went on:

"My child, you must not think me strange; but I want to talk to you—about Richard."

"Yes, aunt," said Eve, whose voice suddenly turned husky, as her heart began to accelerate its motion.

"You love Dick, Eve?"

"Oh, aunt dear, yes," faltered the girl, with tears rising to her eyes.

"Of course you do, child. No girl could help loving my son."

"Oh, no, aunt."

"I always meant him to marry you here, my dear; for it would be best for both of you. You have always looked upon him as to be your husband."

"Yes, aunt dear, always."

"Yes, and it will be best for you both," said Mrs. Glaire, repeating herself, as if she found some difficulty in what she had to say.

There was silence then for a few minutes, during which the tea-urn went on humming softly, and both women listened for the truant's footsteps, but he did not come.

"Richard is quite a man now," said Mrs. Glaire, after clearing her throat.

"Yes, aunt dear, quite."

"Does he—does he ever talk much to you about—about love?"

"Oh, no, aunt dear," said Eve, in a surprised tone. "But he is always very, very kind to me, and of course he does love me very much. He would never think of talking about it, aunt dear; he shows it."

"Yes, yes, of course," said Mrs. Glaire. "But—but—does he ever talk to you about—being married?"

"Married, aunt? Oh, no!"

"He ought to," said Mrs. Glaire, with a sigh. "Eve, my child, I think it would be better for you both if you were married."

"Do you, aunt; why?" said Eve, naïvely.

"It would be better for me, too," said Mrs. Glaire, evading the question.

"Would it, aunt?" said Eve, looking at her for a moment, and then hanging her head as if in deep thought.

"Yes, my dear, I should feel happier—I should feel that Richard was settled, that he had a good, true, dutiful wife, who would watch over him and guide him when I am gone."

"Oh, aunty, aunty, aunty," cried the girl, turning and twining her arms round her neck to kiss her tenderly; "you are low-spirited and upset with that terrible trouble to-day. You must not talk like that. Why, you look so young and bright and happy sometimes, that it's nonsense for you to say dear Dick wants some one to look after him. Of course we shall be married some day—when Dick likes; but we never think of such a thing—at least, I'm sure I don't."

There was a pleasant, rosy flush on the girl's face as she spoke, and just then a cough in the hall made her jump up, exclaiming—

"Here's Dick!"

Mr. Richard Glaire swung the door open directly after, gave a scowl round the room, nodded shortly at his mother, threw himself into an easy-chair, picked up the book Eve had been reading, glanced at it, and with an impatient "pish!" jerked it to the other side of the room.

Eve laughed, made a pretty little grimace at him, and, removing the cosy, hastened to pour out the tea, one cup of which she held ready, evidently expecting that Richard would come and take it to his mother. Then, seeing that he did not pay any heed to her look, she carried the cup herself, round by the back of the young man's chair, giving his hair a playful twitch as she went by.

"Don't!" shouted Richard, angrily, and then in an undertone muttered something about "confounded

childishness," while Eve bent over her aunt, and whispered softly—

"He'll be better when he has had some tea, aunt dear. He's upset with thinking about to-day."

Mrs. Glaire nodded, and watched the pretty, graceful form as Eve tripped back, to stand for a moment or two behind Richard's chair, resting her hands upon his shoulders as she whispered tenderly—

"Does your face hurt you, Dick dear?"

"Bother!" growled Dick, pouring the cup of tea to which he had helped himself down his throat. "Here, fill this."

Eve took the cup and saucer, only smiling back at him, and refilling it, said, playfully—

"Dick's cross, aunty. I'm going to give him double allowance of sugar to sweeten his temper."

"I wish you'd pour out the tea, and not chatter so," he cried, impatiently. "What with your tongue and hers, there isn't a bit of peace to be had in the place."

Eve looked pained, but the look passed off, and without attending to her own wants, she took some bread and butter across to where Richard sat scowling at the wall.

"Won't you have something to eat, Dick dear?" she said, affectionately.

"NO!"

There are a good many ways of saying "no." This was one of the most decisive, and was uttered so sharply that Eve forbore to press that which she had brought upon her cousin, and carried it to her aunt.

The rest of the time before retiring was passed in about as agreeable a way, till, at a nod from Mrs. Glaire, Eve said "Good night," being affectionately embraced by her aunt, and then turning to Dick, she bent over him.

"Good night, dear Dick," she whispered, holding her cheek to be kissed, as she rested her hands upon his shoulders.

"There, good night. For goodness' sake don't paw one about so."

Eve remained motionless, with the tears gathering in her eyes, for a few moments, before bending down and kissing the young man's forehead.

"Good night, dear darling Dick," she whispered. "I'm very sorry about all your troubles; but don't speak like that, it—it hurts me."

The next moment she had taken up her candlestick and glided from the room.

Richard Glaire gave himself an impatient twist in his chair, and lay back thinking of the warm, glowing beauties of Daisy Banks, when he started up in affright, so silently had his mother risen from her couch, advanced, laid her hands upon his shoulder, one crossed over the other, and said in a low, clear voice—

"Dick, you are thinking of Daisy Banks."

"I—I thought you were asleep," he stammered.

"I was never more wide awake, Richard—to your interests," said Mrs. Glaire.

"I don't know what you mean," he said, petulantly, as he gave the lamp-shade a twist, so that its light should not fall upon his face, and then changed his position a little.

"Yes, you do, Richard—perfectly," said Mrs. Glaire. "I said just now that you were thinking of Daisy Banks."

"Yes, I heard you say so; and I said, I don't know what you mean."

An angry retort was upon Mrs. Glaire's lips, but she checked the hasty expression, and pressing her hands a little more firmly upon her son's shoulders, she went on—

"You know perfectly well what I mean, Richard, and I must speak to you about that, as well as about the business."

"Look here," exclaimed the young man, impatiently, "I'm tired and worried enough for one day. I'm going to bed."

He started up, crossed to the side table, took a candle, and advancing to the lamp, was about to light it with a taper, when, to his surprise, his mother, who of late years had given up to him in everything, took candle and taper from his hands and pressed him back unresisting into his seat.

"Richard, you are not going to bed till you have heard what I have to say."

"I tell you I am worn out and worried!" he exclaimed

"You were not too tired to go out and keep engagements," said Mrs. Glaire, firmly.

"Who told you I had been out to keep engagements?" retorted Richard, sharply.

"My heart, Richard," said his mother. "I know as well as if I had seen you that you have been to-night to meet Daisy Banks."

"What stuff, mother!"

"As you have often been to meet her; Richard, tell me, do you wish to marry her?"

"I marry that hoyden—that workman's daughter! Mother, are you mad?"

"You are only a workman's son, sir."

"My father made me a gentleman, mother," said Richard, taking out a cigarette, "and I have the tastes of a gentleman. May I light this?"

"Smoke if you wish to, Richard," said Mrs. Glaire, quietly. "I have never stood in your way when that was a just one."

Richard lit his cigarette, threw himself back in his chair with one leg over an arm, and said negligently—

"Well, if I am to be lectured, go on."

"I am not going to lecture you, my son," said Mrs. Glaire, firmly; "I am only interposing when I see you hesitating on the brink of a precipice."

"Look here, mother," cried Richard; "do you want to quarrel?"

"No, Richard, to advise."

"Then don't talk stuff, mother."

"I shall not, Richard, neither shall I let you put me off in what I wish to say. I am going to speak to you about Joseph Banks' daughter, and about the business."

"Now, look here, mother," cried the young man, who with all his desire to go, felt himself pinned down in his chair by a stronger will—"look here. What stuff have you got in your head about that little girl?"

"The stuff, as you call it, that is the common talk of the town."

"Oh, come, that's rich," cried Richard, with a forced laugh. "To keep me up here and scold me about the

common talk of scandal-mad Dumford. Mother, I thought you had more sense."

"And, I, Richard, thought that you had more honour; that your fatherhad brought you up as a gentleman; and that you really had the tastes of a gentleman."

"Come, I say, this is coming it too strong, you know, mother," said the young man in a feeble kind of protestation. "It is too hard on a fellow: it is indeed, you know."

"Richard," continued Mrs. Glaire, with her words growing more firm and deep as she proceeded, "I have had Daisy Banks in this house off and on for years, as the humble companion of Eve, who is shut out here from the society of girls of her own age. It was a foolish thing to do, perhaps, but I was confident in the honour and gentlemanly feeling of my son, the wealthiest and greatest man in Dumford—in the honour of my son who is engaged to be married to his second cousin, Eve Pelly, as good, pure-minded, and sweet a girl as ever lived."

"Oh, Eve's right enough," said Richard, roughly, "or she ought to be, for I'm sick of hearing her praises."

"A girl who loves you with her whole heart, and who only waits your wishes to endow you with the love and companionship that would make you a happy man to the end of your days."

"Oh yes," said Richard, yawning. "I know all about that."

"And what do I wake up to find?"

"Goodness knows, mother; some mare's nest or another."

"I wake up to find what Joseph Banks, our trusty old foreman, also wakes up to find."

"What!" roared Richard, thrown off his balance; "does he know?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Glaire; "he, too, knows. Does that touch you home?"

"D——n!" muttered Richard, between his teeth.

"Yes, Banks, too, has woke up to the fact that you are frequently seen alone, and in a clandestine manner, with his only child; but he believes that you love her, that

you, in spite of your position, remember that you are only a workman's son, and that you mean to marry a workman's daughter, and bring her home here as the wife of the master of Dumford Works."

"Confound it all!" muttered Richard, biting his nails.

"He smiles at the notion of your being engaged to Eve, for he believes you to be honourable and a gentleman, while I, your mother, am obliged to know that your designs are evil, that you plot the ruin of a poor weak girl—I wake up, in short, to know that my son is behaving like a scoundrel."

"Hold your tongue!" cried Richard, hoarsely; and leaping up, he took two or three turns backwards and forwards in the room, before throwing himself once more in his chair.

"But you've not spoken to Joe Banks?" he cried.

"I have, this morning," said Mrs. Glaire, and then, her voice trembling, and the judge-like tone giving way to one of appeal, she threw herself at the young man's knees, clasping them with her arms, and then catching at and holding his hand. "Dick, my boy—my darling—I was obliged to speak—I *am* obliged to speak to you. You know how, since you became of age, I have delivered everything into your hands—how I have kept back from interfering—how I have been proud to see the boy I brought into the world rich and powerful. You know I have never stood in the way, though you have poured out like water on your betting and gambling the money your father and I saved by dint of scraping and saving."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Richard, with a sneer.

"No," cried his mother, appealingly, "it is not, Dick, my boy; it is that I wish to make you see your danger before it is too late. You mad, infatuated boy, can you not see that by what you have done you have set all your workmen against you? You see how you are treated to-day!"

"Oh yes," said Richard; "and I've got the marks upon me."

"Who stood by you, faithfully and true, as he has always stood by our house in similar times of danger—

danger not brought on by folly?—Banks, your father's old fellow-workman—a man as true as steel."

"Oh yes, Joe Banks is right enough," muttered Richard.

"And yet you, Dick—oh, Dick, Dick, my boy, think what you are doing—you would reward him for his long services by doing him the greatest injury man could do to man. Are you mad?"

"If I'm not, you'll drive me mad," cried Richard, trying to shake off his mother's tight embrace.

"No, no, Dick, you shall not leave me yet," cried Mrs. Glaire, in impassioned tones, as the tears now streamed down her cheeks. "You must—you shall listen to me. Can you not see that besides maddening the poor man by the cruel wrong you would do, you will make him your deadly enemy; that the works would be almost helpless without him; and that he is the strong link that holds the workpeople to our side? For they respect him, and——"

"Go on. They don't respect me, you were going to say," said Richard, petulantly. "Oh, mother, it's too bad. You've got hold of some cock-and-bull bit of scandal, set about by one of the chattering fools of the place—old Bullivant, very likely—and you believe it."

"Richard, my boy," said Mrs. Glaire, rising and standing before him, "can you not be frank and candid with your own mother?"

"You won't let me," he said; "you do nothing but bully me."

"When I tell you of your danger; when I remind you that you are standing on the edge of a precipice——"

"Oh, hang the precipice!" he cried; "you said that before."

"When I warn you of the ruin, and beg of you on my knees, my boy, if you like, not to pursue this girl—not to yield to a weak, mad passion that will only bring you misery and regret to the end of your days, for you would never marry her."

"Well, it isn't likely," he said, brutally.

"Dick—Dick," cried Mrs. Glaire, passionately, roused by the callous tone in which he spoke, "are you in your

right senses, or have you been drinking? It cannot be my boy who speaks!"

"Well, there, all right, mother, I'll own to it all," he said, flippantly, and then he winced as the poor woman cast her arms round his neck, and strained him to her breast.

"I knew you would, my boy, as soon as the good in your nature got the upper hand. And now, Dick, you'll promise me you won't see Daisy Banks any more."

"All right, mother, I won't."

"Thank you, Dick. God bless you for this. But I must talk to you a little more. I have something else to say."

"What, to-night?" he said, with a weary yawn.

"Yes, to-night. Just a few words."

"Go on then, only cut it short."

"I wanted to say a few words to you about Eve."

"Oh, bother Eve," he muttered. "Well, go on."

"Don't you think, Dick, my boy, you've been very neglectful of poor Eve lately?"

"Been as attentive as I ever have."

"No, no, Dick; and listen, dear; try and be a little more loving to her."

"Look here, mother," cried Richard, impatiently; "I've promised all you want."

"Yes, yes, my boy."

"Well, if you get always trying to thrust Eve down my throat, I shall go away."

"Richard!"

"I'm tired of being bored about her."

"But your future wife! Dick, my boy—there, only a few more words—will you take my advice?"

"Yes—no—yes; well, there, I'll try."

"Don't you think, then, *that* had better come off soon?"

"*That!* What?"

"Your marriage."

"No, indeed I don't, so I tell you. I don't mean to be tied up to any woman's apron-string till I have had my fling. There, good night; I'm going to bed."

Mrs. Glaire made an effort to stay him, but he brushed

by her, turned at the door, said, "Good night," and was gone.

As the door closed, Mrs. Glaire sank into the chair her son had so lately occupied, and sat thinking over their conversation.

Would he keep his word? Would he keep his word? That was the question that repeated itself again and again, and the poor woman brought forward all her faith to force herself to believe in her son's sense of honour and truth, smiling at last with a kind of pride at the victory she had won.

But as she smiled, lighting her candle the while, and then extinguishing the lamp, a shiver of dread passed through her at the recollection of the events of the day; and at last, when she passed from the room a heavy shadow seemed to follow her. It was the shadow of herself cast by the light she carried, but it seemed to her like the shadow of some coming evil, and as she went upstairs and passed her son's door, from beneath which came the odour of tobacco, she sighed bitterly, and went on wondering how it would end, for she had not much faith in his promise.

CHAPTER XII.

MORE TROUBLE AT THE WORKS.

"I SHALL have to do something about these people," said the vicar, as he descended, after making a hasty toilet.

His way out lay through the room appropriated by the objects of his thoughts, and on opening the door it was to find Mr. Simeon Slee's toilet still in progress. In fact, that gentleman was seated in a chair, holding a tin bowl of water, and his wife was washing his face for him, as if he were a child.

They took no notice of the interruption, and the vicar passed through, intending to take a long walk, but he checked his steps at the gate, where he stood looking down the long street, that seemed a little brighter in the early morning.

He had not been there five minutes before he saw a sodden-looking man come out of the large inn—the Bull

and Cucumber—and as the pale, sodden-looking man involuntarily wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, the vicar nodded.

"Morning drain, eh? I'm afraid yours is not a very comfortable home, my friend."

The man was going slowly down the street when his eye caught the figure of the vicar, and he immediately turned and came towards him, and touched his hat.

"Mr. Selwood, sir?"

"That is my name, my man."

"I'm Budd, sir—J. Budd—the clerk, sir. Thowt I'd come and ask if you'd like the garden done, sir. I'm *the* gardener here, sir. Four days a week at Mr. Glaire's. Your garden, sir——"

"Would have looked better, Budd, if, out of respect to the church and the new vicar, you had kept it in order."

"Yes, sir; exackly, sir; but I was too busy, sir. Shall I come, sir?"

"Yes, you may come, Budd. By the way, do you always have a glass before breakfast?"

"Beg pardon, sir—a glass?"

"Yes, at the Bull?"

"Never, sir," said Budd, with an injured air. "I went in to take Mr. Robinson's peck."

"Peck of what? pease?"

"Peck, sir—peck-axe—maddick."

"Oh, I see," said the vicar, looking at the man so that he winced. "Well, Budd, come and see to the garden after breakfast."

"That I will, sir."

"And, by the way, Budd."

"Yes, sir."

"Don't wipe your mouth when you have been to return picks or mattocks. I'm rather a hard, matter-of-fact person, and it makes me think a man has been drinking."

Jacky Budd touched his hat without a word, stuck one thumb into his arm-hole, and went off to inform the next person he met that "new parson" was a tartar and a teetotaler.

By this time Simeon Slee had gone off in another direction, and as the vicar was busy with his pocket-knife, pruning some trailing branches from the front windows, Mrs. Slee came to announce that his breakfast was ready, and soon after relieved him of a difficulty.

"Going, eh, Mrs. Slee? When?"

"I thowt we'd flit to-day, sir. We only came in to take charge of the house."

"Have you a place to go to?"

"Yes, sir."

"Humph! Well, it's best, perhaps, Mrs. Slee, for I am a frank man, and I don't think your husband and I would agree. You couldn't come and keep me right till I've got a housekeeper, I suppose?"

Mrs. Slee could, and said she would; and that morning Jacky Budd helped the poor woman to "flit" her things to a neighbouring cottage, Simeon vowing that he'd "never set foot in the brutal priest's house again."

"You're well shut of a bad lot, sir," said Jacky Budd, turning to Mr. Selwood, after the last items of the Slee impedimenta were off the premises, and he had looked round the wilderness of a garden, sighed, and wondered how he should ever get it in order.

"Think so, Budd?" said the vicar, drily.

"Yes, sir, I do," said Jacky, resting on the spade he had not yet begun to use; "he's a Ranter, is Slee, a Primity Methody, sir—a fellow as sets up against our Church—helps keep the opposition shop, and supplies small-beer instead of our sacrymental wine."

Jacky involuntarily smacked his lips as he spoke, and the vicar turned sharply upon him with knit and angry brows.

But Jacky Budd was obtuse, and saw it not, but went on, wiping his forehead the while, as if he were panting and hot with his exertions.

"They had him down on the plan, sir; they did, 'pon my word of honour, sir—him, a regular shack, as never does a day's work if he can help it. He was a local preacher, and put on a white 'ankercher o' Sundays, and went over to Churley, and Raiby, and Beddlethorpe, and Mardby, and the rest of 'em, he did. It's as good as a

play, sir, to hear him preach. But they've 'bout fun' him out now."

"You have been to hear him, then, Budd?" said the vicar, drily.

"Me? Been to hear he? Me, sir—the clerk of the parish? No, sir; I never bemeaned myself by going into one of their chapels, I can assure you," said Jacky, indignantly; and raising his spade, he chopped down a couple of unorthodox weeds growing up within the sacred borders of the vicarage garden.

"I'm glad to hear it, Budd," said Mr. Selwood, looking at him curiously; "and now I think as you've begun, we'll go on with the gardening."

"To be sure, sir—to be sure," said Jacky, looking round and sighing at the broad expanse of work; "but if I might be so bold, sir, I should say, Don't you have nowt to do wi' that chap Slee. He's a regular Shimei, sir—a man as curses and heaves stones at our holy Church, sir—a man as comes in the night, and sows tares and weeds amongst our wheat."

"Exactly, Budd," said the vicar, looking him full in the face; "but now suppose we sink the metaphorical and take to the literal. There are tares and weeds enough here, so suppose you root them out of the garden."

"Yes, sir, of course, sir; I was just going to," said Jacky. "It's a lovely garden when it's in good order. I suppose you wouldn't like me to get Thad Warmouth and one of the Searbys to come and help me—labouring chaps, sir, and very strong?"

"No, Budd, I really should not," said the vicar; "and besides, it would be depriving you of a good deal of work. What three men would do in two days will last one man six."

"Exactly, sir—thanky, sir; it's very thowtful of you," said Jacky, sighing, and looking as if he would be willing to be deprived of a good deal of work; and then he began to chop at the ground very softly, as if, knowing that it was his mother earth, he was unwilling to hurt it.

"I'm fond of gardening myself, Budd; it's good, healthy work, and I dare say I shall help you a great

deal. Excuse me; lend me that spade a moment. I think it would be as well to drive it right in like this—it will save further trouble; this wild convolvolus takes such a strong hold of the soil."

He took the tool and dug for a few minutes lustily, stooping down after each newly-turned spadeful to pick up and remove the long white trailing roots that matted it together, horrifying Jacky, who took off his hat and wiped his dewy forehead, for it made him perspire freely to see such reckless use of muscular power.

"Thanky, sir; yes, I see," said Jacky, taking the spade again with a sigh, and fervently wishing that he had not undertaken the job. "Hallo! here's the Missus."

He paused, and rested his foot on the spade, as just then Mrs. Glaire, driving a little four-wheel chaise, drawn by an extremely chubby pony, like a heavy cart-horse cut down, drew up by the vicarage gate.

The little lady was greatly agitated, though she strove hard to keep an equable look upon her countenance, returning the vicar's salute quietly, as he walked down to the gate; whilst such an opportunity of a respite from the spade not being one to be neglected, Jacky Budd stuck that implement firmly amongst the weeds, and followed closely.

"Shall I hold Prinkle, mum?" he said, going to the pony's head.

"Yes—no, Jacky, I'm not going to stay," said Mrs. Glaire. "Are you at work here, then?"

"Yes, mum."

"Mind he does work, then, Mr. Selwood," she continued; "and don't let him have any beer, for he's a terribly lazy fellow."

Jacky looked appealingly at his mistress, then smiled, and looked at the vicar, as much as to say, "You hear her—she will have her joke."

"Is anything the matter?" said the vicar, earnestly.

"Well, yes; not much, Mr. Selwood; but I am getting old and nervous, and I thought I would ask you to come up. You seemed to have so much influence with the men."

"Certainly I'll come up, if I can be of any use."

"Pray get in, then," said Mrs. Glaire, and the springs of the little vehicle went down as the vicar stepped in, while, during the minute or two that ensued as Mrs. Glaire drove up to the foundry she told him that the works had not been opened till mid-day, when it had been agreed upon by her son—at her wish—that he would receive some of the workmen at the counting-house, and try to make some arrangement about terms.

"I went to the works, too," she said, "not to interfere, but to try and be ready to heal any breach that might arise. Of course I called in as if by accident, as I was going for a drive."

"And has anything occurred?" said the vicar.

"No; but I was afraid, for Richard is very impetuous, and I thought as—as you saw what you did yesterday——"

"My dear Mrs. Glaire, pray always look upon me as an old friend, who has your welfare and that of the people thoroughly at heart. Oh, here we are."

His remarks were cut short by the pony turning sharply in at the great gates, as if quite accustomed to the place, and as the men, who were pretty thick in the yard, made way, some of them roughly saluting the occupants of the chaise, the pony stopped of its own accord in front of the counting-house.

The vicar sprang out and helped Mrs. Glaire to alight, following her into the building, where Richard was sitting, looking very sulky, at the head of a table, and about a dozen of the men were present, Simeon Slee being in the front rank.

"It's going agen my advice, Mester Richard Glaire," he was saying. "If the men did as I advise, they'd stand out, but I'm not the man to stand in the way of a peaceable settlement, and as you've come to your senses, why I agree."

"I didn't agree for you to come to the works, Slee," said Richard, sharply.

"Yes, yes, yes," chorused half-a-dozen voices; "all or none, Maister. All or none."

"I can stand out," said Sim, loftily. "I can afford to

be made a martyr and a scapegoat, and bear the burthen. I don't want to come back to work."

"And I don't want and don't mean to have you," said Richard, hotly. "I sent to you all this morning, forgiving the brutal treatment I met with yesterday——"

"Your own fault," said a voice.

"Howd the tongue, theer," said one of the men, who seemed to take a leading part. "Bygones is bygones. You sent for us, Maister Richard, and we've come. You says, says you, for the sake o' peace and quiet you'd put wage where it were, and you've done it, but it must be all or none. Fair play's fair play, ain't it, parson?"

"Yes, yes, Richard, give way," whispered Mrs. Glaire; and with an impatient stamp of his foot Richard Glaire gave his lip a gnaw, and exclaimed—

"There, very well; Slee can come back; but mind this, if he begins any of his games and speech-making in the works again, he goes at once."

"Oh, I can stay away," said Slee, in an injured tone; but his fellow-workmen held to his side, and, to Mrs. Glaire's great relief, an amicable settlement was arrived at, and the men were about to go, when Banks, the old foreman, burst into the place in a towering passion.

"Howd hard, theer," he roared, looking fiercely round. "You're a pretty set o' cowardly shacks, you are. Do you call that a fighting fair?"

"What is it, Banks?" exclaimed Richard, starting.

"Don't make no terms wi' 'em at all, for they wean't keep to 'em, the blackguards."

"But what is it?" cried Richard, impatiently.

"What is it? What is it, Mrs. Glaire? Why, I was watching here mysen till nine o'clock, and left all safe."

"Well?" cried Richard, turning pale.

"Look here, Joe Banks," cried the man who had been speaking before; "tak' it a bit easy, theer. None o' us ain't done nowt, ha'e we, lads?"

"No," was chorused, Sim Slee's voice being the loudest.

"Done nowt!" roared Banks, like an angry lion. "D'yer call it nowt to steal into a man's place, and coot and carry off every band in t' whole works?"

"Have they—have they done that, Banks?" cried Richard.

"Have they?" roared the foreman; "ask the sneaking cowards"

"No, no, we hain't," cried the leader, bringing his hand down on the table with a thump. "It's a loi, ain't it, lads—a loi?"

"Yes," was chorused; "we ain't done nowt o' t' sort."

"Then who did it?" cried Banks; and there was a silence.

"Look here," cried Richard, who had been brought very unwillingly to this concession by Mrs. Glaire, and gladly hailed an excuse for evading it. "Look here, Banks, are all those wheel-bands destroyed?"

"Ivery one of 'em," said Banks.

"Then I'll make no agreement," cried Richard, in a rage. "You may strike, and I'll strike. It's my turn now—be quiet, mother, I'm master here," he cried, as Mrs. Glaire tried to check him. "I won't have my property destroyed, and then find work for a pack of lazy, treacherous scoundrels. There's a hundred pounds' worth of my property taken away. Make it up, and put it back, and then perhaps I'll talk to you."

"But I tell you, Mester, it's none o' us," cried the leader.

"None of you!" sneered Richard. "Why, the bands are gone, and I'm to give way, and pay better, and feed you and yours, and be trampled upon. Be off, all of you. Go and strike, and starve, till you come humbly on your knees and beg for work."

"Had you not better try and find out the offender, Mr. Glaire?" interposed the vicar, who saw the men's lowering looks. "Don't punish the innocent with the guilty."

"Well spoke, parson," cried a voice.

"You mind your own business, sir," shouted Richard. "I know how to deal with my own workmen. You struck for wages, and you assaulted me. I'll strike now, you cowards, for I'll lock you out. The furnaces are cold; let them stop cold, for I'll lose thousands before I'll give in. I'll make an example of you all."

"You'll repent this, Mester Richard Glaire," shouted Slee.

"I'll repent when I see you in gaol, you mouthing demagogue!" cried Richard. "Now, get off my premises, all of you, for I'll hold no more intercourse with any of the lot."

"But I tell you, Mester," said the leader, a short, honest-looking follow, "it's——"

"Be off, I tell you," shouted Richard. "Where are my bands?"

The man wiped his forehead, and looked at his companions, who one and all looked from one to another, and then, as if feeling that there was a guilty man amongst them—one who had, as it were, cut the ground from beneath their feet—they slowly backed out, increasing their pace, though, towards the last, as if each one was afraid of being left.

"Go after them, Banks, and see them off the premises," said Richard, with a triumphant look in his eye. "Let's see who'll be master now."

The foreman went after the deputation, and there was a low murmuring in the yard, but the men all went off quietly, and the great gates were heard to clang to.

"Oh, Richard, my boy," said Mrs. Glaire, "I'm afraid you've made matters worse."

"I'll see about that," said Richard, rubbing his hands, and giving a look askant at the vicar, who stood perfectly silent. "They'll be down on their knees before the week's out, as soon as the cupboard begins to be nipped. Are they all gone, Banks?"

"Yes, they're all gone," said the foreman, returning. "I wouldn't ha' thowt it on 'em."

"Stop!" cried Richard, as a sudden idea seemed to strike him. "What time did you go away, Joe?"

"'Bout nine."

"And all was right then?"

"That I'll sweer," said the foreman. "I went all over the works. It must ha' been done by some cowardly sneak as had hid in the place."

"I know who it was," said Richard, with his eyes sparkling with malicious glee.

"Know who it was?" said Banks. "Tell me, Maister Richard, and I'll 'bout break his neck."

"It was that scoundrel, Tom Podmore."

"Who? Tom Podmore? Yah!" said the foreman, in a tone of disgust; and then with a chuckle, "I dessay he'd like to gi'e you one, Maister Dick; but go and steal the bands! It ain't in him."

"But I tell you I saw him!" cried Richard.

"Saw him? When?"

"Hanging about the works here last night between nine and ten."

"You did!" cried the foreman, eagerly.

"That I did, myself," said Richard, while the vicar scanned his eager face so curiously that the young man winced.

Joe Banks stood thinking with knitted brow for a few moments, and then, just as Mrs. Glaire was going to interpose, he held up his hand.

"Wait a moment, Missus," he said. "Look here, Maister Richard, you said you saw Tom Podmore hanging about the works last night?"

"I did."

"There's nobbut one place wheer a chap could ha' been likely to ha' gotten in," said Banks, thoughtfully. "Wheer might you ha' sin him?"

"In the lane by the side."

"That's the place," said the foreman, in a disappointed tone. "That theer window. Was he by hissen?"

"Yes, he was quite alone," said Richard, flinching under this cross-examination.

"And what was you a-doing theer, Maister Richard, at that time?" said the foreman, curiously.

"I—I—" faltered Richard, thoroughly taken aback by the sudden question; "I was walking down to go into the counting-house, with a sort of idea that I should like to see if the works were all right."

"Ho!" said the foreman, shortly; and just then the eyes of the young men met, and it seemed to Richard that there was written in those of the vicar the one word, "Liar!"

"Did you speak, sir?" said Richard, blanching, and then speaking hotly.

"No, Mr. Glaire, I did not speak, but I will, for I should like to say that from what I have seen of that young man Podmore, I do not think he is one who would be guilty of such a dastardly action."

"How can you know?" said Richard, flushing up. "You only came to the town yesterday."

"True," said the vicar; "but this young man was my guide here, and I had some talk with him."

"I hope you did him good," said Richard, with an angry sneer.

"I hope I did, Mr. Glaire," said the vicar, meaningly, "and I think I did, for he told me something of his life, and I gave him some advice."

"Of course," from Richard.

"Richard, my son, pray remember," exclaimed Mrs. Glaire.

"Oh yes, I remember, mother," cried Richard, stung with rage by the doubting way in which his charge had been received; "but it is just as well that Mr. Selwood here should learn at once that he's not coming to Dumford to be master, and do what he likes with people."

"It is far from my wish, Mr. Glaire," said the vicar, with a bright spot burning on each cheek, for he was young and impulsive too, but the spots died out, and he spoke very calmly. "My desire here is to be the counsellor and friend of both master and man—the trusty counsellor and faithful friend. My acquaintance with this young workman Podmore was short, but I gave him a few friendly words on his future action, and the result was that he came and fought for his master like a man when he was in the midst of an angry mob."

"So he did, parson, so he did," said Banks, bluntly.

"And came in a malicious, cowardly way at night to destroy my property," cried Richard.

"Nay, nay, lad, nay," said Banks, sturdily. "Parson's raight. Tom Podmore ain't the lad to do such a cowardly trick, and don't you let it be known as you said it was him."

"Let it be known!" said Richard, grinding his teeth. "Why, I'll set the police after him, and have him transported as an example."

"Nay, nay, lad," said Banks, "wait a bit, and I'll find out who did this. It wasn't Tom Podmore—I'll answer for that."

"Let him prove it, then—and he shall," cried Richard, who hardly believed it himself; but it was so favourable an opportunity for having an enemy on the hip, that he was determined, come what might, not to let it pass.

Five minutes later the parties separated, the works were shut up, and Richard Glaire did not reject the companionship of the vicar and the foreman to his own door, for there were plenty of lowering faces in the street—women's as well as men's; but the party were allowed to pass in sullen silence, for the strikers felt that "the maister" had something now of which to complain, and the better class of workmen were completely taken aback by the wanton destruction of the machinery bands.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE FOREMAN AT HOME.

THERE had been a few words at Joe Banks's plainly-furnished home when he returned the previous night.

Everything looked very snug—the plain, simple furniture shone in the lamplight, and a cosy meal was prepared, with Mrs. Banks—a Daisy of a very ripened nature—sitting busily at work.

"Well, moother," said Banks, as he entered, and threw himself into a chair.

"Well, Joe," said Mrs. Banks, without looking up.

"Phee-ew!" whistled Joe, softly, as he took up the pipe laid ready beside the old, grey, battered, leaden tobacco-box, filled the bowl, and lit up before speaking again, Mrs. Banks meanwhile making a cup of tea for him to have with his supper.

"Why didn't you come home to tea, Joe—didn't you know there was some pig cheer?"

"Bit of a row up at the works. Didn't you know?"

"Bless us and save us, no!" cried Mrs. Banks, nearly dropping the teapot, and hurrying to her husband's side. "You're not hurt, Joe?"

"Not a bit, lass. Give us a buss."

Mrs. Banks submitted ungraciously to a salute being placed upon her comely cheek, and then, satisfied that no one was hurt, she proceeded to fill up the pot, and resumed her taciturn behaviour.

"Owd woman's a bit popped," said Joe to himself. Then aloud, "Wheer's Daisy?"

"That's what I want to know," said Mrs. Banks, tartly. "Wheer's Daisy? There's no keeping the girl at home now-a-days, gadding about."

"Is she up at the House?" said Joe.

"I suppose so," said Mrs. Banks; "and, mark my words, Joe, no good 'll come of it. It's your doing, mind."

"Nonsense, nonsense, old woman. What's put you out? Come, let's have some supper; I'm about pined."

"Then begin," said Mrs. Banks.

"Not wi'out you, my lass," said Joe, winking at the great broad-faced clock, as much as to say, "That'll bring her round."

"I don't want any supper," said Mrs. Banks.

"More don't I, then," said Joe, with a sigh; and he got up, took off his coat, and then began to unlace his stout boots.

"Bless and save the man! wheer are you going?" exclaimed Mrs. Banks.

"Bed," said Joe, shortly. "Tired out."

"What's the use o' me having sausages cooked and hot ready for you if you go on that a way, Joe?"

"I can't eat sausages wi'out a smile wi' 'em for gravy," said Joe, quietly, "and some one to eat one too."

"There, sit down," said Mrs. Banks, pushing her lord roughly into his well-polished Windsor chair. "I don't know what's come to the man."

"Come home straange and hungry," said Joe, smiling; and the next minute, on Mrs. Banks producing a steaming dish of home-made sausages from the oven, Joe began a tremendous onslaught upon them, after helping his wife, and putting a couple of the best on a plate.

"Just put them i' the oven to keep hot for Daisy, wilt ta, my lass?" said Joe.

"She won't want any supper," said Mrs. Banks, tartly;

but she placed the plate in the oven all the same, and after pouring out some tea, set the teapot on the hob.

"But she may, my lass, she may," said Joe. "Now, tell us what's wrong," he continued, with his mouth full, after pouring a large steaming cup of tea down his capacious throat.

"Tom Podmore's been here," said Mrs. Banks. "Only just gone. Didn't you meet him?"

"No," said Joe. "Didn't he say nowt about the row?"

"Not a word," said Mrs. Banks, looking up. "Was he in it?"

"Just was," said Joe. "Saved me and the Maister from being knocked to pieces a'most. He's a good plucky chap, is Tom."

"Yes; and nicely he gets treated for it," said Mrs. Banks, hotly.

"Who treats him nicely?" said Joe, with half a slice of bread and butter disappearing.

"You—Daisy—everybody."

"Self included, my lass!" said Joe. "He allus was a favourite of yours."

"Favourite, indeed!" said Mrs. Banks. "Joe, mark my words—It'll come home to Daisy for jilting him as she's done; and as I told him to-night, he's a great stupid ghipes to mind anything about the wicked, deceitful girl."

"Here, have some more sausage, mother; it's splendid; and don't get running down your own flesh and blood."

"Own flesh and blood!" cried Mrs. Banks. "I'm ashamed of her."

"No, you're not, lass," said Joe, with a broad grin. "Thou'rt as proud of her as a she peacock wi' two tails. Now, lookye here, lass; you've took quite on that Daisy should have Tom. Well, he's a decent young fellow enew, and if she'd like him I should ha' said nowt against it, but then she didn't."

"She don't know her own mind," said Mrs. Banks.

"Oh yes, she do," said Joe, smiling, "quite well; and so does some one else. The Missus has fun' it out."

"Mrs. Glaire?"

"Yes, the Missus. She sent for me to-day to speak to me about it."

"What, about her boy coming after our Daisy?"

"About Mr. Richard Glaire, maister o'Doomford Foundry, taking a fancy to, and having matrimonial projects with regard to his foreman's daughter," said Joe, pompously.

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Banks, eagerly; "and does she like it?"

"Well—er—er—er—she's about for and again it," said Joe, slowly.

"Now that won't do, Joe," exclaimed Mrs. Banks. "You can't deceive me, and I'm not going to be put aside in that way. I know as well as if I'd ha' been theer that she said she didn't like."

"Well, what does it matter about what the women think? Dick—I mean Maister Richard Glaire's hard after her."

"And means to marry her?" said Mrs. Banks.

"Marry her? Of course. Didn't Baxter, of Churley, marry Jane Kemp? Didn't Bill Bradby, as was wuth fifty thousand, marry Polly Robinson, of Toddlethorpe, and make a real lady of her, and she wasn't fit to stand within ten yards o' my Daisy."

"Yes, go on," said Mrs. Banks. "That's your pride."

"Pride, be——blowed, it's only a difference in money. Richard Glaire's only my old fellow-workman's son, and Daisy's my daughter, and I can buy her as many silk frocks, and as many watches, and chains, and rings as any lady in the land need have," said Joe, angrily, as he slapped his pocket. "I ain't gone on saving for twenty years for nowt. She shan't disgrace him when they're married."

"Yes, Joe, that's your pride," said Mrs. Banks.

"Go it," said Joe, angrily, "tant away—tant—tant—tant. I don't keer."

"It's your pride, that's what it is. When she might marry a decent, honest, true-hearted lad like Tom, who's worth fifty Richard Glaires—an insignificant, stuck-up dandy."

"Don't you abuse him whose bread you eat," said Joe.

"I don't," said Mrs. Banks. "Its his mother's and

not his. I believe he soon wouldn't have a bit for himself, if it wasn't for you keeping his business together. Always sporting and gambling, and fooling away his money."

"Well, if I keep it together, it's for our bairn, isn't it?" said Joe.

"And he's no better than he should be."

"You let him alone," said Joe, stoutly. "All young men are a bit wild 'fore they're married. I was for one."

"It's a big story, Joe," said Mrs. Banks, indignantly. "You wasn't, or I shouldn't ha' had you."

Joe winked at the clock again, and laughed a little inside as he unbuttoned another button of his vest—the second beginning at the top—to keep count how many cups of tea he had had.

"It's my opinion," said Mrs. Banks, "that—"

"Howd thee tongue, wilt ta?" cried Joe. "Here's the lass."

Daisy entered as he spoke, looking very pale and anxious-eyed, hastened through the kitchen, and went up-stairs to take off her hat and jacket.

"Just you make haste down, miss," said Mrs. Banks, tartly.

"I don't want any supper, mother," said the girl, hurriedly.

"Then I want thee to ha'e some!" exclaimed Mrs. Banks; "so look sharp."

Daisy gave a sigh and hurried up-stairs, and, as the door closed, Joe brought his hand down on the table with a thump that made the cups and saucers dance.

"Now, look here, old woman—that's my bairn, and I wean't have her wherrited. If she is——"

"I'm going to say what's on my mind, Joe, when it's for my child's good," said Mrs. Banks, stoutly.

"Are you?" said Joe, taking another cup of tea and undoing another button; "then so am I. Lookye here, my lass! I would'nt ha' took a step to throw Daisy in young Maister's way, but as he's took to her, why, I wean't ha' it interfered wi'—so now, then."

"Don't blame me, then, Joe; that's all," said Mrs. Banks.

"Who's going to?" said Joe. "So now let's have none of your clat."

Daisy came in then, and took her place at the table, making a very sorry pretence at eating, and only speaking in monosyllables till her mother pressed her.

"Did Mrs. Glaire send you home with anybody?"

"No, mother."

"Did you come home alone?"

"No, mother."

"Humph! Who came with you?"

"Tom, mother."

Mrs. Banks looked mollified, and Joe surprised.

"Has Miss Eve been playing to you, to-night?"

"No, mother."

"What have you been doing, then?"

"I—I—havn't been at the House," stammered Daisy.

Joe turned sharply round.

"Have you been a-walking with Tom, then?"

"No, mother, I only met him—coming home—and he walked beside me," said the girl, with crimson cheeks.

"Theer, theer, theer," said Joe, interposing, "let the bairn alone. Daisy, my lass, mak' me a round o' toast."

How Joe was going to dispose of a round of toast after the meal he had already devoured was a problem; but Daisy darted a grateful look at him, made the toast—which was not eaten—and then, after the things were cleared away, read for an hour to her father, straight up and down the columns of the week-old county paper, till it was time for bed, without a single interruption.

But Mrs. Banks made up for it when they went to bed, and the last words Joe heard before going to sleep were—

"Well, Joe, I wash my hands of the affair. It's your doing, and she's your own bairn."

And Joe Banks went to sleep, and dreamed of seeing himself in a new suit of clothes, throwing an old shoe after Daisy as she was being carried off by Richard Glaire in a carriage drawn by four grey horses, the excitement being such that he awoke himself in the act of crying "Hooray!" while poor Daisy was kneeling by her bedside, sobbing as though she would break her heart.

CHAPTER XIV.

SIM SLEE SEES ANOTHER OPENING.

"HERE, just hap me up a bit," said Sim Slee to his wife, as he lay down on a rough kind of couch in their little keeping-room, as the half sitting-room, half kitchen was called; and in obedience to the command, Mrs. Slee happed him up—in other words threw a patchwork counterpane over her lord.

"If you'd come home at reasonable times and tak' thee rest you wouldn't be wantin' to sleep in the middle o' the day," said Mrs. Slee, roughly.

"Ah, a deal you know about things," grumbled Sim. "You'd see me starved with cold before you'd stir, when I was busy half the night over the affairs of the town."

"I'stead o' your own," grumbled Mrs. Slee.

"Howd thee tongue, woman," said Sim. "I'm not going to sleep, but to think over matters before I go and see Joe Banks this afternoon. I can think best lying down."

Mrs. Slee resumed her work, which was that of making a hearthrug of shreds of cloth, and soon after Sim was thinking deeply with his mouth open, and his breath coming and going with an unpleasant gurgle.

As soon as he was asleep, Mrs. Slee began busily to prepare the humble dinner that was cooking, and spread the clean white table for her lord's meal. A table-cloth was a luxury undreamed of, but on so white a table it did not seem necessary.

When all was ready, she went across the room and touched Sim, who opened his eyes and rose.

"That's better," he said. "I feel as tiff as a band now. Where's the Rag Jack's oil?"

Without a word, Mrs. Slee went to the little cupboard and produced a dirty-looking bottle of unpleasant-looking liquid, one which was looked upon in the district as an infallible cure for every kind of injury, from cuts and bruises down to chilblains, and the many ailments of the skin.

"How did you do that?" said Mrs. Slee, sharply, as

her husband held out a finger that was torn and evidently festering.

"Somebody was nation fast the other day, and pulled me off the foundry wall."

"Where you'd got up to speak, eh?" said Mrs. Slee.

"Where I'd got up to speak," said Sim, holding his hand, while his wife dressed it with the balm composed by the celebrated Rag Jack, a dealer who went round from market to market, and then tied it up in a bit of clean linen.

"That's better," said Sim, taking his place at the table. "What is there to yeat?"

"There'd be nothing if it was left to you—but wind," said his wife, sourly, as she took the lid off a boiler, hanging from the recking hooks of the galley balk, and proceeded to take out some liquid with a tea-cup.

"But, then, it ain't," said Sim, smiling. "You see, I knew where to pick up a good missus."

"Yes," retorted his wife, "and then tried to pine her to dead for all you'd do to feed her. Wilt ta have a few broth?"

"Yes," said Sim, taking the basin she offered him and sniffing at it. "Say, wife, you've been waring your money at a pretty rate."

"I've wared no money ower that," said Mrs. Slee. "Thou mayst thank parson for it."

"Yah!" growled Sim, dipping his spoon, and beginning angrily; "this mutton's as tough as a bont whong."

"There, do sup thee broth like a Christian, if thee canst!" exclaimed Mrs. Slee. "Wilt ta have a tate?"

Sim held out his basin for the "tate" his wife was denuding of its jacket, and she dropped it into the broth.

"Say!" exclaimed Sim, poking at the potato with his spoon, "these taters are strange and sad."

Mrs. Slee did not make any reply, but went on peeling potatoes one by one, evidently in search of a floury one to suit her husband, who objected to those of a waxy or "sad" nature. But they were all alike, and he had to be content.

"I'll have a few more broth," said Sim, at the end of a

short space of time, and before his wife had had an opportunity to partake of a mouthful; and this being ladled out for him and finished, Sim condescended to say "that them broth wasn't bad."

"Have you got any black beer?" he now asked.

Mrs. Slee had—a little, and the bottle of black beer, otherwise spruce, being produced, Sim had a teaspoonful of the treacly fluid mixed in a mug of hot water with a little sugar; and then, leaving his wife to have her meal, he rose and went out.

A week had passed since the discovery of the loss of the bands, and though Sim had been dodging about and watching in all directions, he had never once hit upon Joe Banks alone, so he had at last made up his mind to go straight to his house, and, to use his own words, "beard the lion in his den."

A good deal had taken place in the interval, and among other things, Richard Glaire, in opposition to the advice of his mother and Banks, had applied for a warrant against Tom Podmore, for destroying or stealing the bands; but as yet, from supineness or fear on the part of the local police, it had not been put in force.

For things did not look pleasant in Dumford; men were always standing about in knots or lounging at the doors of their houses, looking loweringly at people who passed. There had been no violence, and in a prosperous little community, a week or two out of work had little effect upon a people of naturally saving habits and considerable industry; but those who were wise in such matters said that mischief was brewing, and it was reported that meetings were held nightly at the Bull and Cucumber—meetings of great mystery, where oaths were taken, and where the doors were closed and said to be guarded by men with drawn swords.

"Hallo, Sim Slee, off preaching somewhere?" said a very stout man, pulling up his horse as he overtook Sim on his way to the foreman's house. He was indeed a very stout man, so stout that he completely filled the gig from side to side, making its springs collapse, and forming a heavy load for his well-fed horse.

"No, I ain't going preaching nowheer, Mester Purley,"

said Sim, sulkily, as he looked up sideways in the speaker's merry face.

"I thought you were off perhaps to a camp meeting, or something, Sim, and as I'm going out as far as Roby, I was going to offer you a lift along the road."

There was a twinkle in the stout man's eyes as he spoke, and he evidently enjoyed the joke.

"No, you warn't going to offer me a ride, doctor," said Sim. "Do you think I don't know?"

"Right, Sim Slee, right," said the doctor, chuckling. "I never gave a man a lift on the road in my life, did I, Sim? Puzzle any one to sit by my side here, wouldn't it?"

"Strange tight fit for him if he did," said Sim.

"So it would, Sim; so it would, Sim;" laughed the doctor. "I've asked a many though in my time; ha—ha—ha."

"That you have, doctor," said Sim, looking at the goodly proportions of the man by his side. For it was Mr.—otherwise Dr.—Purley's one joke to ask everybody he overtook, or any of his convalescent patients, if they would have a lift in his gig. He had probably fired the joke as many times as he was days old; but it was always in use, and it never struck him that it might grow stale.

"What's the matter with you hand, Sim?" said the doctor, touching the bound-up member with his whip.

"Bit hurt—fell off a wall," said Sim, thrusting it in his breast.

"And you have been poisoning it with Rag Jack oil, eh? I'll be bound you have, and when it's down bad you'll come to me to cure it. Say, Sim, some of your fellows knocked the young master about pretty well—he's rare and bruised."

"I wish ivery bit of gruzzle in his body was bruzz," said Sim, fiercely.

"Do you now!" said the doctor, smiling. "Well, I suppose it'll come to broken heads with some of you, and then you'll be glad of me. Who stole the bands?"

Sim jumped and turned pale, so suddenly and sharply was the question asked.

"How should I know?" he cried, recovering himself.

"Some of you chaps at the Bull, eh, Sim? Artful trick, very. Say, Sim, if you want a doctor for your society, remember me. Ck!"

This last was to the horse, which went off immediately at a sharp trot, with the springs of the gig dancing up and down, as the wheels went in and out of the ruts.

"Remember you, eh!" said Sim, as the doctor went out of hearing. "Have you for the medical man? Yes, when we want ivery word as is spoke blabbed all over the place. It's my belief," continued Sim, sententiously, "as that fat old blobkite tells the last bit o' news to every baby as soon as it's born, and asks them as he's killed whether they'd like a ride in his gig. Hallo! there's owd Joe Banks leaning over his fence. What a fierce-looking old maulkin he is; he looks as sour as if he'd been yeating berry pie wi'out sugar. Day, Banks," he said, stopping.

"Day," said Joe, shortly, and staring very hard at the visitor.

"I think it'll rean soon, mun."

"Do yow?" said Joe, roughly.

"I weer over to Churley yesterday," said Sim, "and it reant all day."

"Did it?" said Joe.

"Ay, it did. 'Twas a straange wet day."

"Where are you going!" said Joe.

"Oh, only just up to Brown's to see if I could buy a bit o' kindling for the Missus."

"Go and buy it, then," said Joe, turning his back, "and let me get shut o' thee."

"Say, Joe Banks," said Sim, quite unabashed, "as I have met thee I should just like to say a word or two to thee."

"Say away then."

"Nay, nay. Not here. Say, mun, that's a fine primp hedge o' yourn," he continued, pointing to the luxuriant privet hedge that divided the garden of the snug house from the road.

"You let my primp hedge bide," said Joe, sharply; "and if you've got any mander o' message from your lot, spit it out like a man."

"Message! I a message!" said Sim, with a surprised air. "Not I. It was a word or two 'bout thy lass."

Joe Bank's face became crimson, and he turned sharply to see if any one was at door or window so as to have overheard Sim's words.

As there was no one, he came out of the gate, took his caller's arm firmly in his great fist, and walked with him down the lane out of sight of the houses; for the foreman's pretty little place was just at the edge of the town, and looked right down the valley.

Sim's heart beat a little more quickly, and he felt anything but comfortable; but, calling up such determination as he possessed, he walked on till Joe stopped short, faced him, and then held up a menacing finger.

"Now, look here, Sim Slee," said Joe; "I just warn thee to be keerful, for I'm in no humour to be played wi'."

"Who wants to play wi' you?" said Sim; "I just come in a neighbourly way to gi'e ye a bit o' advice, and you fly at me like a lion."

"Thou'rt no neighbour o' mine," said Joe, "and thou'rt come o' no friendly errant. Yow say yow want to speak to me 'bout my lass. Say thee say."

"Oh, if that's the way you tak' it," said Sim, "I'm going."

"Nay, lad, thee ain't," said Joe. "Say what thee've got to say now, for not a step do yow stir till yo' have."

Sim began to repent his visit; but seeing no way of escape, and his invention providing him with no inoffensive tale, he began at once, making at the same time a good deal of show of his bound-up hand, and wincing and nursing it as if in pain.

"Well, Joe Banks, as a man for whom, though we have differed in politics and matters connected with the wucks, I always felt a great respect——"

"Dal thee respect!" said Joe; "come to the point, man."

"I say, Joe, that it grieves me to see thee stick so to a mester as is trying to do thee an injury."

"An yow want to talk me over to join thy set o' plotting, conspiring shackbags at the Bull, eh?"

"I should be straange and proud to feel as I'd browt

a man o' Joe Banks's power and common sense into the ways o' wisdom, and propose him as a member o' our society," said Sim.

"I dare say thee would, Sim ; strange and glad. But that's not what thee come to say. Out wi' it, mun ; out wi' it."

"That is what I come to say, Joe," said Sim, turning white, as he saw the fierce look in Joe's eyes.

"Nay ; thee said something 'bout my lass."

"I only were going to say as I didn't like to see such a worthy man serving faithful a mester as was trying to do him an injury."

"What do you mean ?" said Joe, quite calmly.

Sim hesitated, but he felt obliged to speak, so calmly firm was the look fixed upon him, though at the same time the foreman's fists were clenched most ominously.

"Well, Joe," said Sim, with a burst, "Dicky Glaire's allus after thy bairn, and I saw him the other night, at nearly midnight, trying to drag her into the counting-house."

"Thee lies, thee chattering, false-hearted maulkin !" roared Joe, taking the trembling man by the throat and shaking him till his teeth clicked together.

"Don't ! don't ! murder !" cried Sim, holding up his injured hand with the rag before Joe's face. "Don't ill-use a helpless man."

"Thou chattering magpie !" roared Joe, throwing him off, so that Sim staggered back against the prickly hedge, and quickly started upright. "I wish thee weer a man that I could thrash till all thee bones were sore. Look here, Sim Slee, if thee says a word again about my lass and the doings of thee betters it'll be the worse for thee."

"My poor hand ! my poor hand !" moaned Sim, nursing it as if it were seriously injured.

"Then thee shouldn't ha' made me wroth," said Joe, calming down, and blaming himself for attacking a cripple.

"I didn't know that thou wast going to wink at thee lass being Dicky Glaire's mis——"

Sim did not finish the word, for Joe Banks's fist fell upon his mouth with a heavy thud, and he went down

in the road, and lay there with his lips bleeding, and a couple of his front teeth loosened.

"Thou lying villain," said Joe, hoarsely, "howd thee tongue, if thee wants to stay me from killing thee. I'd ha' let thee off, but thou wouldst hev it. Don't speak to me again, or I shall——"

He did not trust himself to finish, but strode off, leaving Slee lying in the dust.

"Poor Master Richard!" he muttered. "A scandal-hatching, lying scoundrel—as if the lad would think a wrong word about my lass. Well," he added, with a forced laugh, "that has stopped his mouth, and a good many more, as I expect."

As he disappeared, Sim Slee slowly sat up, took out his handkerchief and wiped his bleeding mouth. Then rising he walked on half a mile to where a stream, known as the Beck, crossed the road, and there he stooped down and bathed his cut lip till the bleeding ceased.

"All raight, Mester Joe Banks," he said, with a malicious look in his eye. "All raight, I'll put that down to you, my lad. I shan't forget it. Some men fights wi' their fists, and some don't. I'm one as don't; but I can fight other ways. I'll be even wi' you, Joe Banks; I'll be even wi' you. Thou blind owd bat. Think he'll marry her, dosta! Ha! ha! ha! ha! All raight. Let it go on. Suppose I help it now, and then get thee on our side after—a blind old fool, I shan't forget this."

Sim Slee washed his handkerchief carefully in the brook, spread it in the sun to dry, and then lay down amongst the furze bushes to think, till, seeing a couple of figures in the distance on the hill-side he caught up his handkerchief and, stooping down, ran along under the shelter of the hedge, and on and on till he reached a fir plantation, through which he made his way till he was within easy reach of the two figures, in utter ignorance of his proximity.

"'Tis them," he muttered, peering out from the screen of leaves formed by the undergrowth of the edge of the plantation. "'Tis them. Got his arm round her waist, eh! A kiss, eh! Ha—ha—ha! Joe Banks, I shall be upsides wi' you yet."

He glided back, and then, knowing every inch of the ground, he went to the end of the copse, out on to the open hill-side, and, running fast, made a circuit which brought him out on the track far beyond the figures, who were hidden from him by the inequalities of the waste land, close by where the vicar found Tom Podmore on his arrival.

Then, hastening on, he approached, stooping until he had well measured his distance, when pausing for a few minutes to gain his breath, he walked on with his footsteps inaudible on the soft, velvety turf, till, coming suddenly upon the two figures, seated behind a huge block of stone, he stopped short, as if in surprise.

"Beg pardon, sir, didn't see," he said, with a smile and a leer.

"What the deuce do you want?" said Richard Glaire, starting to his feet, while, with a faint cry, Daisy Banks ran a few steps.

"Why you quite scar'd me, sir," said Sim, "starting up like that. I've only been for a walk out Chorley way. It's all raight, Miss Banks, don't be scar'd; its only me. I know, Mr. Glaire, sir, I know. Young folks and all that sort o' thing. We ain't friends about wuck matters, but you may trust me."

He gave Richard a peculiar smile, shut one eye slowly, and walked on, smiling at Daisy, whose face was crimson as he passed.

"Oh, Richard! oh, Richard!" she sobbed, "why did you tempt me to come? Now he'll go straight home and tell father."

"Tempt you to come, eh, Daisy!" said Richard. "Why, because I love you so; I'm not happy out of your sight. No, he won't tell—a scoundrel. There, you go home the other way. I'll follow Master Sim Slee. I know the way to seal up his lips."

He caught Daisy in his arms and kissed her twice before she could evade his grasp, and then ran off after Slee, who was steadily walking on, smiling, as he caressed his tender, bruised lip with his damp handkerchief.

Once he pressed his thumb down on his palm in a meaning way, and gave an ugly wink. Then he chuckled,

but checked his smiles, for they hurt his swollen face.

"Not bad for one day, eh! That's ointment for Mester Joe Banks's sore place, and a bit o' revenge at the same time. This wean't have nowt to do wi' the strike; this is all private. Here he comes," he muttered, twitching his ears. "I thowt he would. Well, I mean to have five pun' to howd my tongue, and more when I want it. And mebbe," he continued, with an ugly leer, "I can be a bit useful to him now and then."

A minute later Richard Glaire had overtaken Sim Slee, and a short conversation ensued, in the course of which something was thrust into the schemer's hand. Then they parted, and that night, in spite of his swollen lip, Sim Slee delivered a wonderful oration on the rights of the British workman at the meeting at the Bull, at which were present several of the men after Sim's own heart; but the shrewd, sensible workmen were conspicuous by their absence, as they were having a quiet meeting of their own.

CHAPTER XV.

DAISY IS OBSTINATE.

"A LUNGEING villain," muttered Joe Banks to himself, "he knows nowt but nastiness. Strange thing that a man can't make up to a pretty girl wi'out people putting all sorts o' bad constructions on it. Why they're all alike—Missis Glaire, the wife and all. My Daisy, too. To say such a word of her."

He hastened home, filled his pipe, lit it, and went out and sat down in the garden, in front of his bees, to smoke and watch them, while he calmed himself down, and went over what had gone by, before thinking over the future.

This was a favourite place with Joe Banks on a Sunday, and he would sit in contemplative study here for hours. For he said it was like having a holiday and looking at somebody else work, especially when the bees were busy in the glass bells turned over the flat-topped hives.

"I'd no business to hit a crippled man like that," mused Joe; "but he'd no business to anger me. Be a lesson to him."

He filled a fresh pipe, lit it by holding the match sheltered in his hands, and then went on—

"Be a lesson to him—a hard one, for my hand ain't light. Pity he hadn't coot away, for he put me out."

"Now, what'll I do?" mused Joe. "Shall I speak to the maister?

"No, I wean't. He'll speak to me when it's all raight, and Daisy and him has made it up. I'll troost him, that I will; for though he's a bit wild, he's a gentleman at heart, like his father before him. Why of course I'll troost him. He's a bit shame-faced about it o' course; but he'll speak all in good time. Both of 'em will, and think they're going to surprise me. Ha—ha—ha! I've gotten 'em though. Lord, what fools young people is—blind as bats—blind as bats. Here's Daisy."

"It's so nice to see you sitting here, father," said the girl, coming behind him, and resting her chin on his bald crown, while her plump arms went round his neck.

"Is it, my gal? That's raight. Why, Daisy lass, what soft little arms thine are. Give us a kiss."

Daisy leaned down and kissed him, and then stopped with her arms resting on his shoulders, keeping her face from confronting him; and so they remained for a few minutes, when a smile twinkled about the corners of the foreman's lips and eyes as he said—

"Daisy, my gal, I've been watching the bees a bit."

"Yes, father," she said, smiling, though it was plain to see that the smile was forced. "Yes, father, you always like to watch the bees."

"I do, my bairn, I do. They're just like so many workmen in a factory; but they don't strike, my gal, they don't strike."

"But they swarm, father," said Daisy, making an effort to keep up the conversation.

"Yes," chuckled Joe, taking hold of the hand that rested on his left shoulder. "Yes, my bairn, I was just coming to that. They swarm, don't they?"

"Yes, father."

"And do you know why they swarm, Daisy?"

"Yes, father; because the hive is not big enough for them."

"Yes, yes," chuckled Joe, patting the hand, and holding it to his rough cheek. "You're right, but it's something more, Daisy: it's the young ones going away from home and setting up for themselves—all the young ones 'most do that some day."

The tears rose to Daisy's eyes, and she tried to withdraw her hand, for Joe had touched on a tenderer point than he imagined; but he held it tightly and gave it a kiss.

"There, there, my pet," he said, tenderly, "I won't tease you. I knew it would come some day all right enough, and I don't mind. I only want my little lass to be happy."

"Oh, father—father—father," sobbed Daisy, letting her face droop till it rested on his head, while her tears fell fast.

"Come, come, come, little woman," he said, laughing; "thou mustn't cry. Why, it's all right." There was a huskiness in his voice though, as he spoke, and he had to fight hard to make the dew disappear from his eyes. "Here, I say, Daisy, my lass, that won't do no good: you may rain water for ever on my owd bald head, and the hair won't come again. There—tut—tut—tut—you'll have mother here directly, and she'll be asking what's wrong."

Daisy made a strong effort over self, and succeeded at last in drying her eyes.

"Then, you are not cross with me, father!" faltered Daisy.

"Cross, my darling? not a bit," said Joe, patting her hand again. "You shan't disgrace the man as has you, my dear; that you shan't. Why, you're fit to be a little queen, you are."

Daisy gave him a hasty kiss, and ran off, while Joe proceeded to refill his pipe.

"Cross indeed! I should just think I hadn't," he exclaimed—"only with the women. Well, they'll come round."

But if the Daisy had stood on the hillside a couple of hours earlier, just by the spot where Tom Pilmore had sat on the day of the visits' arrival, he would perhaps have viewed the matter in a different light, for—of course by accident—Daisy and there encountered Richard Glaire, evidently not for the first time since the night when they were interrupted by Tom in the lane.

It was plain that my officer Richard had given on the night in question had long been condoned, and that at every meeting he was gaining a stronger mastery over the girl's heart.

"Then you will, Daisy, won't you?" he whispered to her.

"No, no, Dick; dear. Don't ask me. Let me tell father all about it."

"What!" he cried.

"Let me tell father all about it, and I'm sure he'll be pleased."

"My dear little Daisy, how well you use names," he cried, playfully; and as he looked lovingly down upon her the foolish girl began to compare him with the lover of her mother's choice—a man, who was nearly always blackened with his labours, and heavy and rough spoken, while here was Richard Glaire professing that he worshipped her, and looking in her eyes, so handsome in his fashionably-cut blue coat with the reeshuk in the buttonhole, and wearing patent leather boots as right as the brass plates upon his well-formed hands.

"I can't keep my name," she said, regretfully.

"I wouldn't have it changed for the world, my little pet," he whispered, playing with her dimpled chin; "only you are so fresh as a daisy."

"What is your name, Dick?" she said, reading to him.

"Why you are so young and innocent. Look here, my darling, don't you see how I'm placed? My mother wants me to marry Eva."

"But you don't really, really, really, see the best little life for her, in you, Mr. Richard?"

"Mr. Richard!" reproachfully.

"Dear Dick, then," she whispered, coloring up, and glancing shyly at him, but restored through the veil of her fondness.

"Of course I don't love her. Haven't I sworn a hundred times that I love only you, and that I want you to be my darling little wife?"

"Yes, yes," said the girl, softly.

"Well, then, my darling, if you go and tell your father, the first thing he'll do will be to go and tell my mother, and then there'll be no end of a row."

"But she loves you very much, Dick."

"Worships me," said Dick, complacently.

"Of course," said the girl, softly; and her foolish little eyes seemed to say, "She couldn't help it," while she continued, "and she'd let you do as you like, Dick."

"Well, but you see the devil of it is, Daisy, that I promised her I wouldn't see you any more."

"Why did you do that?" said the girl, sharply.

"To save rows—I hate a bother."

"Richard, you were ashamed of me, and wouldn't own me," said Daisy, bursting into tears.

"Oh, what a silly, hard-hearted, cruel little blossom it is," said Richard, trying to console her, but only to be pushed away. "All I did and said was to save bother, and not upset the old girl. That's why I want it all kept quiet. Here, as I tell you, I could be waiting for you over at Chorley, we could pop into the mail as it came through, off up to London, be married by licence, and then the old folks would be in a bit of a temper for a week, and as pleased as Punch afterwards."

"Oh, no, Richard, I couldn't, couldn't do that," said the girl, panting with excitement.

"Yes, you could," he said, "and come back after a trip to Paris, eh, Daisy? where you should have the run of the fashions. What would they all say when you came back a regular lady, and I took you to the house?"

"Oh, Dick, dear Dick, don't ask me," moaned the poor girl, whose young head was in a whirl. "I couldn't—indeed I couldn't be so wicked."

"So wicked! no, of course not," said Richard, derisively—"a wicked little creature. Oh dear, what would become of you if you married Richard Glaire!"

"You're teasing me," she said, "and it's very cruel of you."

"Horribly," said Richard. "But you will come, Daisy?"

"I couldn't, I couldn't," faltered the girl.

"Yes, you could, you little goose."

"Dick, my own handsome, brave Dick," she whispered, "let me tell father."

He drew back from her coldly.

"You want to be very obedient, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, dear Richard," she said, looking at him appealingly.

"You set such a good example, Daisy, that I must be very good too."

"Yes, dear," she said, innocently.

"Yes," he said, with a sneer; "so you go and tell your father like a good little child, and I'll be a good boy, too, and go and tell my mother, and she'll scold me, and say I've been very naughty, and make me marry Eve."

"Oh, Richard, Richard, how can you be so cruel?" cried the poor girl, reproachfully.

"It isn't I; it's you," he said, smiling with satisfaction as he saw what a plaything the girl's heart was in his hands. "Are you going to tell your father?"

"Oh, no, Dick, not if you say I mustn't."

"Well, that's what I do say," he exclaimed, sharply.

"Very well, Dick," she said, sadly.

"And look here, Daisy, my own little one," he whispered, kissing her tear-wet face, "some day, when I ask you, it shall be as I say, eh?"

"Oh, Dick, darling, I'll do anything you wish but that. Don't ask me to run away."

"Do you want to break off our match?" he said, bitterly.

"Oh, no—no—no—no."

"Do you want to make my home miserable?"

"You know I don't, Richard."

"Because I tell you I know my mother will never consent to it unless she is forced."

"But you are your own master now, Richard," she pleaded.

"Not so much as you think for, my little woman. So

come, promise me. I know you won't break your word if you do promise."

"No, Dick, never," she said, earnestly; and if there had been any true love in the young fellow's breast he would have been touched by the trusting, earnest reliance upon him that shone from her eyes as she looked up affectionately in his face.

"Then promise me, Daisy, dear," he whispered; "it is for the good of both of us, and—— Hang it all, there's Slee."

Daisy was sent off as we know, and the tears fell fast as she hastened home, feeling that love was very sweet, but that it's roses had thorns that rankled and stung.

"Oh, Dick, Dick," she sobbed as she went on, "I wish sometimes that I'd never seen you, for it is so hard not to do whatever you wish."

She dried her eyes hastily as she neared home, and drew her breath a little more hardly as about a hundred yards from the gate she saw Tom Podmore, who looked at her firmly and steadily as they passed, and hardly responded to her nod.

"He knows where I've been. He know's where I've been," whispered Daisy to herself as she hurried on; and she was quite right, for her conscious cheeks hoisted a couple of signal flags of the ruddiest hue—signals that poor Tom could read as well as if they had been written down in a code, and he ground his teeth as he turned and watched her.

"She's such a good girl that any one might troost her," he muttered, as he saw her go in at the gate, "or else I'd go and tell Joe all as I knows. But no, I couldn't do that, for it would hurt her, just as it would if I was to half kill Dick Glaire. She'll find him out some day perhaps—not as it matters to me though, for it's all over now."

He walked back, looking over the green fence as he passed, and Mrs. Banks waved her hand to him from the window; but his eyes were too much occupied by the sight of Daisy leaning over her father, and he walked on so hurriedly that he nearly blundered up against a great stalwart figure coming the other way.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE VICAR'S FRIENDS.

"WHAT cheer, owd Tommy?" cried the stalwart figure, pulling a short black pipe out of his mouth.

"Hallo, Harry," said Tom, quietly, at least as quietly as he could, for the words were jerked out of his mouth by the tremendous clap on the shoulder administered by the big hammerman.

"What's going to be done, Tommy?" growled the great fellow. "I'm 'bout tired o' this. I wants to hit something."

He stretched out his great sinewy arm, and then drawing it back, let it fly again with such force that a man would have gone down before it like a cork.

"Come along," said Tom, who wished to get away from the neighbourhood of Banks's cottage for fear Mrs. Banks should call to him.

Harry was a man whose brain detested originality. He was a machine who liked to be set in motion, so he followed Tom like a huge dog, and without a word.

As they came abreast of the vicarage they saw the vicar at work gardening, and Jacky Budd making believe to dig very hard in the wilderness still unreclaimed.

Even at their distance, Jacky's pasty face and red ripe nose, suggestive of inward tillage, were plainly to be seen, and just then a thought seemed to strike Tom, who turned to his companion, staring with open mouth over the hedge.

"Like a job, Harry?"

"Hey, lad, I should."

"Come in here, then," said Tom, laying his hand on the gate.

"That I will, lad," said Harry. "I want to scrarp some 'un, and I should 'mazing like a fall wi' that theer parson."

Tom smiled grimly, and entered, followed by Harry.

They were seen directly by the vicar, who came up and shook hands with Tom.

"Ah, Podmore, glad to see you. Well Harry, my

man," he continued, holding out his hand to the other, "is the lump on your forehead gone?"

Harry took the vicar's hand, and held it in a mighty grip, while with his left he removed his cap and looked in the lining, as if to see if the bruise was there.

"Never thowt no more 'bout it, parson." Then gazing down at the soft hand he held, he muttered, "It's amaazin'!"

"What's amazing?" said the vicar, smiling.

"Why that you could hit a man such a crack wi' a hand like this 'ere."

"Don't mind him, sir; it's his way," said Tom, apologetically. "Fact is, parson, we're tired o' doing nowt."

"I'm glad to hear you say so, Podmore," said the vicar, earnestly. "I wish from my heart this unhappy strife were at an end. I'm trying my best."

"Of course you are, sir," said Tom; "but I thowt mebbe you'd give Harry here and me a bit o' work."

"Work! what work?" said the vicar, wonderingly.

"Well, you said I'd best get to work, and I've got nowt to do. That Jacky Budd there's picking about as if he was scarred o' hurting the ground: let me and Harry dig it up."

The vicar looked from one to the other for a moment, and as his eyes rested on Harry, that giant gave Tom a clap on the shoulder hard enough to make a bruise, as he exclaimed—

"Hark at that now, for a good'n, parson. Here, gie's hold of a shovel."

The vicar led the way to the tool-house, furnished his visitors with tools, and then stood close at hand to supply the science, while the way in which the two men began to dig had such an effect on Jacky Budd that he stood still and perspired.

A dozen great shovelfuls of earth were turned over by Harry, who then stopped short, threw off his coat and vest, tightened the belt round his waist, and loosening the collar of his shirt, proceeded to roll up the sleeves before moistening his hands and seizing the spade once

more, laughing heartily as he turned over the soft earth like a steam plough.

"Slip int' it, Tommy. Well, this is a game. It's straange and fine though, after doin' nowt for a week."

Tom was digging steadily and well, for he was a bit of a gardener in his way, having often helped Joe Banks to dig his piece in the early days of his love.

"Better borry some more garden, parson; we shall ha' done this 'ere in 'bout an hour and a half," said Harry, grinning; and then"—— crack!

"Look at that for a tool!" he cried, holding up the broken shovel, snapped in two at the handle.

"Try this one, Harry," said Jacky Budd, handing his own spade eagerly; "I've got some hoeing to do."

Harry took the tool and worked away a little more steadily, with the result that poor Jacky Budd was deprived of a good deal of the work that would have fallen to his lot; a deprivation, however, that he suffered without a sigh.

"Now, I ain't agoing to beg, parson," said Harry, after a couple of hours' work, "but my forge wants coal, and a bite o' bread and a bit o' slip-coat cheese would be to raights."

"Slip-coat cheese?" said the vicar.

"He means cream cheese," said Tom, who had been working away without a word, keeping Jacky busy clearing away the weeds.

"No, I don't," growled Harry. "I mean slip-coat, and a moog o' ale."

"Shall I go and fetch some, sir?" said Jacky Budd, eagerly.

"Thank you, no, Budd," said the vicar, quietly. "I won't take you from your work;" and, to Jacky's great disgust, he went and fetched a jug of ale from his little cellar himself.

"He ain't a bad 'un," cried Harry, tearing away at the earth. "Keeps a drink o' ale i' the plaace. I thowt parsons allus drunk port wine."

"Not always, my man," said the vicar, handing the great fellow the jug, and while he was drinking, up came Jacky with his lips parted, and a general look on his

visage as if he would like to hang his tongue out like a thirsty hound and pant.

"Shall I get the leather, sir, and just nail up that there bit o' vine over the window?"

"Get the what, Budd?" said the vicar, who looked puzzled.

"The leather, sir, the leather."

"He means the lather, sir," said Tom, quietly, "the lather to climb up."

"Oh, the ladder," said the vicar. "Yes, by all means," he continued, smiling as he saw the clerk's thirsty look. "I won't ask you to drink, Budd," he went on as he handed the mug to Tom, who took a hearty draught. "You told me you did not drink beer on principle; and I never like to interfere with a man's principles, though I hold that beer in moderation is good for out-door workers."

"Thanky, sir, quite right, sir," said Jacky, with a blank look on his face. "I'll get the leather and a few nails, and do that vine now."

"Poof!" ejaculated Harry, with a tremendous burst of laughter, as he went on digging furiously. "Well, that's alarming."

"What's the matter, old mate?" said Tom.

"Nowt at all. Poof!" he roared again, turning over the earth. "Jacky Budd don't drink beer on principle. Poof!"

The vicar paid no heed to him, only smiled to himself, and the gardening progressed at such a rate that by five o'clock what had been a wilderness began to wear a very pleasant aspect of freedom from weeds and overgrowth, and with the understanding that the two workers were to come and finish in the morning, they resumed their jackets and went off.

Their visit to the vicarage had not passed unnoticed, however; for Sim Slee had been hanging about, seeking for an opportunity to have a word with his wife, and not seeing her, he had carried the news to the Bull and Cucumber.

"Things is coming to a pretty pass," he said to the landlord. "That parson's got a way of getting ower iverybody. What do you think now?"

"Can't say," said the landlord.

"He's gotten big Harry and Tom Podmore working in his garden like two big beasts at plough."

"He'll be gettin' o' you next, Sim," said the landlord, laughing.

"Gettin' o' me!" echoed Sim. "Not he. He tried it on wi' me as soon as we met; but I wrastled with him by word o' mouth, and he went down like a stone."

"Did he though, Sim?"

"Ay, lad. Yon parson's all very well, but he's fra London, and he'll hev to get up pretty early to get over a Lincoln man, eh?"

"Ay," said the landlord; "but he ain't so bad nayther. A came here and sat down just like a Christian, and talked to the missus and played wi' the bairns for long enough."

"Did he though?" said Sim. "Hey, lad, but that's his artfulness. He wants to get the whip hand o' thee."

"I dunno 'bout that," said the landlord, who eked out his income from the publican business with a little farming. "I thowt so at first, and expected he'd want to read a chapter and give me some tracks."

"Well, didn't he?" said Sim.

"Nay, not he. We only talked once 'bout 'ligious matters, and 'bout the chapel—ay, and we talked 'bout you an' all."

"'Bout me?" said Sim, getting interested, and pausing with his mug half way to his lips.

"Yes," said the landlord. "It come about throof me saying I see he'd gotten your missus to keep house for him."

"Give me another gill o' ale," said Sim, now deeply interested.

The landlord filled his mug for him, and went on :—

"I said she were 'bout the cleanest woman in these parts, and the way she'd fettle up a place and side things was wonderful."

"Yow needn't ha' been so nation fast talking 'bout my wife," said Sim.

"I niver said nowt agen her," said the landlord, chuckling to himself. "And then we got talking 'bout you and the chapel."

"What did he know 'bout me and the chapel?" cried Sim, angrily.

"On'y what I towed him. I said part people went theer o' Sabbath, and that it was a straange niste woshup."

"Nice woshup, indeed! why you niver went theer i' your life," said Sim.

"I said so I'd heerd," said the landlord, stolidly, "and then I towd him how you used to preach theer till they turned thee out."

"What call had you got to do that?" said Sim, viciously.

"Turned thee out, and took thy name off the plan for comin' to see me."

"Well, of all the unneighbourly things as iver I heard!" exclaimed Sim. "To go and talk that clat to a straanger."

"Outer kindness to him," said the landlord. "It was a kind o' hint, and he took it, for I was thinking of his bishop, and he took it direckly, for he says, says he, 'Well, I hope I shan't hev my name took off my plan for coming to see you, Mr. Robinson,' he says. 'I hope not, sir,' I says. 'Perhaps you'll take a glass o' wine, sir,' I says. 'No, Mr. Robinson,' he says, 'I'll take a glass—gill you call it—o' your ale.' And if he didn't sit wi' me for a good hour, and drink three gills o' ale and smoke three pipes wi' me, same as you might, ony he talked more sensible."

"Well, he's a pretty parson, he is," sneered Sim.

"You let him be; he ain't a bad sort at all," said the landlord, quietly.

"Ha, ha!" laughed Sim. "He's got howlt o' you too, Robinson."

"Mebbe he hev; mebbe he hevn't," said the landlord.

"Did he ask you to go to church?"

"Well, not azackly," said the landlord; "but he said he should be very happy to see me theer, just like astin' me to his house."

"Ho, ho!" laughed Sim; "and some day we shall have the Bull and Cowcumber at church."

"What are yow laughin' at, yo' maulkin?" cried the

landlord. "Why, I'd go onywheer to sit and listen to a sensible man talk."

"Aw raight, aw raight, Robinson; don't be put out," said Sim; "but I didn't think as yow'd be got over so easy."

"Who's got over?" said the landlord. "Not I indeed."

"Well," said Sim, "did he say anything more?"

"Say! yes, he's full o' say, and it's good sorter say. I ast him if he'd like to see the farm, and he said he would, and I took him out wheer the missus was busy wi' her pancheons, making bread and syling the milk, and he stopped and talked to her."

"But yow didn't take him out into your moocky owd crewyard, did yo'?"

"Moocky crewyard indeed! but I just did, and I tell you what, Sim Slee, he's as good a judge of a beast as iver I see."

"And then yow showed him the new mare," said Sim, with a grin.

"I did," said the landlord. "'Horncastle?' he says, going up to her and opening her mouth. 'Raight,' I says. 'Six year owd,' he says; and then he felt her legs and said he should like to see her paces, and I had Jemmy to give her a run in the field. 'She's Irish,' he says. 'How do you know?' I says—trying him like to trap him. 'By that turn-up nose,' he says, 'and that wild saucy look about the eye and head.' 'You're raight, parson,' I says. And then he says, 'she was worth sixty pun, every pun of it;' and I told him as I got her for nine and thirty, and ten shillings back. I tell you what, Sim Slee,—Parson's a man, every inch on him. As for the missus, she's that pleased, she sent him ower a pun o' boother this morning from our best Alderney."

"O' course," sneered Sim. "That's the way. That's your cunning priest coming into your house to lead silly women captive, and sew pillows to their armholes."

"Go on wi' yer blather," cried the landlord.

"Go on, indeed," continued Sim. "That's their way. He's a regular Jesooit, he is, and your home wean't soon be your own. He's gettin' ivery woman in the place

under his thumb. He begins wi' Miss Eve theer at the house, and Daisy Banks. Then he's gotten howd o' my missus. Here's Mrs. Glaire allus coming and fetching him out wi' her in the pony shay, and now he's gotten howd o' your owd woman, and she's sendin' him pounds o' boother. It was allus the way wi' them cunning priests: they allus get over the women, and then they do what they like wi' the men. No matter how strong they are, down they come just like Samson did wi' Delilah. It was allus so, and as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be world without end."

"Amen," said Jacky Budd, coming in at the back door. "Gie's a gill o' ale, Robinson. I'm 'bout bunt up wi' thirst. Hallo, Slee, what! are yew preaching agen?"

"Never mind," said Sim, sulkily. "I should ha' thowt parson would ha' fun you in ale, now."

"Not he," said Jacky. "Drinks it all hissen. He's got a little barrel o' Robinson's best i' the house, too."

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed Sim, holding his sides and stooping. "I say, Jacky, put some new basses in one o' the pews for Mester Robinson, Esquire, as is going to come reg'lar to church now. That's the way they do it: 'Send me in a small barrel o' your best ale, Mr. Robinson,' he says, 'and I shall be happy to see you at church.'"

"If yow use up all yer wind, Sim Slee," said the landlord, sturdily, "yow wean't hev none left to lay down the law wi' at the meeting to-night."

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. GLAIRE MAKES PLANS.

Poor Mrs. Glaire was in trouble about her fowls, who seemed possessed of a great deal of nature strongly resembling the human. She had a fine collection of noble-looking young Brahma cockerels, great massive fellows, youthful, innocent, sheepish, and stupid. They were intended for exhibition, and their mistress expected a prize for the birds, which had dwelt together in unity, in-

creasing in bulk and brilliancy of plumage, and had never looked a hen in the face since the day they forsook their mamma in the coop.

And now, by mishap, a wanton young pullet had flown up on to the wall that divided them from the poultry yard, and just cried, "Took—took—took!" before flying down. That was sufficient: a battle royal began amongst the brothers directly, and when Mrs. Glaire went down to feed them she found two birds nearly dead, the rest all ragged as to their feathers, bleeding as to their combs and wattles, and still fighting in a heavy lumbering way, but so weary that they could only take hold of one another with their beaks and give feeble pecks at their dripping feathers.

Mrs. Glaire sighed and made comparisons between Daisy Banks and the wicked little pullet who had caused all this strife, telling herself that she was to be congratulated on having but one son, and wishing that he were married, settled, and happy.

She had decided that she would have the vicar up to dinner that night, and intended to make him her confidant and ally; and accordingly in the evening, while the conversation narrated in the last chapter was going on, the object of it was making his way to the house, getting a friendly nod here and there, and stopping for a minute's chat with the people whose acquaintance he had made.

As a rule they were moody faces he met with amongst the women, for they were more than usually soured at the present time on account of the strike, and the sight of the black coat and white tie was not a pleasant one to them, and the replies to his salute were generally sulky and constrained.

He fared better with the men, in spite of Mr. Simeon Slee's utterances, for the report had gone round and round again that parson could fight, and the church militant, from this point of view, was one that seemed to them worthy of respect.

So he went slowly along the main street, past Mr. Purley, the doctor's, as that gentleman, just returned from a round, was unwedging himself from his gig.

"How do, parson, how do?" he said. "Like a ride with me to-morrow?"

"Well, yes, if you'll get out your four-wheeler," said the vicar, laughing.

"Going up to the house to dinner, parson?"

"Yes."

"Tell Mrs. Glaire I'll be on in ten minutes," said the doctor. "But I say, parson, don't sit on the rubber of whist."

"Doctor," said the vicar, patting him on the shoulder, "I shall not; but bring an extra sovereign or two with you, for I want to win a little money to-night for some of my poor."

"He's a rum one," muttered the doctor, as he went in. "He's a rum one, that he is; but I don't think he's bad at bottom."

Meanwhile the vicar went on, past Ramson and Tomson's, the grocers and drapers, where silks and sugars, taffetas and tea were displayed in close proximity; and although Ramson and Tomson were deacons at the Independent Chapel, and the old vicar had passed them always without a look, a friendly nod was now exchanged, to the great disgust of Miss Primgeon, the lawyer's maiden sister, a lady who passed her time at her window, and who, not being asked to the little dinner she knew was to be held at the house, was in anything but the best of tempers that evening.

Richard Glaire was not aware of his mother's arrangement, and his face wore anything but a pleasant expression as he confronted the vicar in the hall, having himself only just come in.

"How do, Mr. Selwood, how do?" he said, haughtily, as he took out his watch and paid no heed to the extended hand. "Just going to dinner; would you mind calling again?"

"Not in the least," said the vicar, smiling, "often. Look here, Richard Glaire," he continued, laying his hand upon the young man's shoulder, "you don't understand me."

"Will you—er—have the goodness——"

"Oh, yes, of course," said the vicar, "I'll explain all in

good time; but look here, my good young friend, I'm here in a particular position, and I mean to be a sort of shadow or fate to you."

"I really am at a loss to understand," began Richard, whose anger was vainly struggling against the strong will opposed to him.

"I see," said the vicar, "you've been out and didn't know I was coming to dinner. Don't apologise. Ah, Miss Pelly!"

This to Eve, who had heard the voices; and Richard's face grew white with passion as he saw the girl's bright animated countenance and glad reception of their visitor. She tripped down the stairs, and placed both her hands in his, exclaiming—

"I'm so glad, Mr. Selwood. Aunt didn't tell me you were coming to dinner till just now."

"And so am I glad," he said, with a smile touched with sadness overspreading his face, as he saw the eager pleasant look that greeted him, one that he was well enough read in the human countenance to see had nothing in it but the hearty friendly welcome of an ingenuous maiden, who knew and liked him for his depth and conversation. "We shall have a long chat to-night, I hope, and some music."

They were entering the drawing-room together as he spoke.

"Oh yes, yes," cried she, eagerly. "I can never get Dick to sing now. Do you sing, Mr. Selwood?"

"Well, yes, a little," he said, smiling down at her.

"And play?"

"Yes, a little."

"What? Not the piano?"

"Just a little," he said. "I am better on the organ."

"Oh, I am so glad," cried Eve. "Aunt will be here directly; I'm so glad you've come to Dumford. The old vicar was so stiff, and would sit here when he did come and play backgammon all the evening without speaking."

"Backgammon, eh?" said the visitor; "not a very lively game for the lookers-on."

"Yes, and it was so funny," laughed Eve, "he never would allow cards in his presence, though he played with

the dice; and it used to make dear Dick so cross because aunt used to hide the cards. But, oh dear," she exclaimed, colouring slightly, "I hope you don't object to whist."

"My dear Miss Pelly," he said, laughing, "I like every innocent game. I think they all are as medicine to correct the acidity and bitterness of some of the hard work of life."

"Then you'll play croquet with us?"

"That I will."

"Oh, I am glad," cried Eve, with almost childish pleasure. "I can beat Dick easily now, Mr. Selwood, for he neglects his croquet horribly. Mind I don't beat you."

"I won't murmur," he said, laughing.

"But where's aunt?" cried Eve. "She came down before me."

"Aunt" had gone straight into the dining-room to see that all things were in a proper state of preparation, and had stopped short in the doorway on seeing Eve's reception of their guest.

She was about to step forward, when, unseen by him, she caught a glimpse of her son's countenance, as he watched the vicar. His teeth were set, his lips drawn tightly back, and a fierce look of anger puckered his forehead, as with fists clenched he made an involuntary movement after the couple who had entered the drawing-room.

Mrs. Glaire drew back softly, and laying her hand on her beating heart, she walked to the other end of the dining-room, seating herself in one of the windows, half concealed by the curtain.

There was a smile upon her face, for, quick as lightning, a thought had flashed across her mind.

Here was the means at hand to bring her son to his senses. She had meant to take the vicar into her confidence, and ask his aid, stranger though he was, for she felt that his position warranted it; but now things had shaped themselves so that he was thoroughly playing into her hands.

She knew Eve, that she was ingenuous and truthful, and looked upon her marriage with her cousin as a matter of

course. She was a girl who would consider a flirtation to be a crime towards the man who loved her; but the vicar would evidently be very attentive even as he had begun to be, and already Richard's ire was aroused. Richard jealous, she meditated, and he would be roused from his apathetic behaviour to Eve, and all would come right.

"And the vicar?" she asked herself.

Oh, he meant nothing, would mean nothing. He knew the relations of Richard and his cousin, and the plan would —must succeed.

But was she wrong? Was Richard annoyed at the vicar's demeanour towards Eve, or was it her imagination?

The answer came directly, for Richard flung into the room, took up a sherry decanter, and filling a glass, tossed it off.

"Curse him! I won't have him here," he said aloud. "What does he mean by talking to me like that? by hanging after Eve? I won't have it. You there, mother?"

"Yes, my son," she replied, rising and looking him calmly in the face.

"Look here, mother, I won't have that clerical cad here. What do you mean by asking him to dinner?"

"I asked him as a guest who has behaved very kindly to us, Richard. He is my guest. I asked him because I wished to have him; and you must recollect that he is a clergymen and a gentleman."

"If he wasn't a parson," cried Richard, writhing beneath his mother's clear cold glance, for it seemed to his guilty conscience that she could read in his face that he had broken his word about Daisy—"if he wasn't a parson I'd break his neck."

"Richard, I insist," cried his mother, in a tone that he had not heard since he had grown to manhood, and which reminded him of the days when he was sternly forced to obey, "if you insult Mr. Selwood, you insult your mother."

"But the cad's making play after Eve—he's smiling and squeezing her hand, and the little jilt likes it."

"No wonder," said Mrs. Glaire, calmly. "Women like attentions. You have neglected the poor girl disgracefully."

"What! are you going to allow it?" cried Richard. "I tell you he's making play for her."

"I shall not interfere," said Mrs. Glaire, coldly. "I think Eve ought to have a good husband."

"But she's engaged to me!" half-shrieked Richard.

"Well," said his mother, coldly, though her heart was beating fast, "you are a man, and should counteract it. This is England, and in English society, little as I have seen of it, I know that engaged girls are not prisoners. They are, to a certain extent, free."

"I'll soon stop it," cried Richard, fiercely.

"Stop it then, my son, but mind this: I insist upon proper respect being paid to Mr. Selwood."

"I will," cried Richard, speaking in a deep-pitched voice. "I'll do something."

"Then I should take care that my pretensions to her hand were well known," said Mrs. Glaire, with a peculiar look.

"Pretensions—her hand!" said Richard, with a sneer. "Are you mad, mother, that you take this tone? I will soon let them see. I'm not going to be played with."

He was about leaving the room, when his mother laid her hand upon his arm.

"Stop, Richard," she said, firmly. "Recollect this—"

"Well, what?"

"That it was the dear wish of your father and myself to make you a gentleman.

"Well, I am a gentleman," cried Richard, angrily.

"Bear it in mind then, my son; and remember that rude, rough ways disgust Eve, and injure your cause. Mr. Selwood is a gentleman, and you must meet him as a gentleman."

"I don't know what you mean, mother," cried the young man, angrily.

"I mean this, that my son occupies the position of the first man in Dumford; and though his father was a poor workman, and his mother a workman's daughter——"

"There, don't always get flinging my birth in my teeth, mother—do, pray, sink the shop."

"I have no wish to remind you of your origin, Richard," said Mrs. Glaire, with a sigh; "only I wish to make you remember that we educated you to be a gentleman, and that we have given you the means. Act like one."

"I shall do that; don't you be afraid," said Richard.

"And mind, Richard, a true gentleman keeps his word," said Mrs. Glaire, meaningly.

"Well, so do I," exclaimed the young man, flushing up. "What are you hinting at now?"

"I hope you do, my son; I hope you do," said Mrs. Glaire, looking at him fixedly; and then, as a sharp knock came at the front door, she glided out of the room, and her voice was heard directly after in conversation with the bluff doctor.

"Oh, he's here, too, is he?" muttered Dick, biting his nails. "Hang it all! Curse it, how crookedly things go. I—there, hang it all!"

He stood, thinking, with knitted brows, and then hastily pouring out and tossing off another glass of sherry, and smiling in a way that looked very much like the twitch of the lip when a cur means to bite, he said in a mock melodramatic voice—

"Ha—ha! we must dissemble!" and strode out of the room.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE PLAN BEGINS TO WORK.

THE vicar was standing by the flower-stand talking to Eve, and opening out the calyx of a new orchid, a half-faded blossom of which he had picked from the pot to explain some peculiarities of its nature, while Eve, looking bright and interested, drank in his every word.

Mr. Purley was filling out an easy chair, having picked out one without arms for obvious reasons, and he was gossiping away to Mrs. Glaire.

"How do, Purley?" said Richard, with a face as smooth as if nothing had occurred to fret him. "Glad to see you."

"Glad to see you too, Glaire; but you don't say 'How are you?'"

"Who does to a doctor?" laughed Richard. "Why, you couldn't be ill if you tried."

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed Mr. Purley. "Well, if I'm not ill, I'm hungry."

"Always are," said Richard, with a sneer; and then seeing that his retort was a little too pointed, he blunted it by pandering to the stout medico's favourite joke, and added, "Taken any one for a ride lately?"

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed the doctor. "That's good! He's getting a regular Joe Miller in kid gloves, Mrs. Glaire: that he is. Ha-ha-ha!"

Richard gave a short side nod, for he was already crossing the room to the flower-stand.

"Talking about flowers?" he said, quietly. "That's pretty. I didn't know they'd asked you to dinner, Mr. Selwood, and you must have thought me very gruff."

"Don't name it," said the vicar, frankly; but he was looking into the younger man's eyes in a way that made him turn them aside in a shifty manner, and begin picking nervously at the leaves of a plant as he went on—

"Fact is, don't you know, I'm cross and irritable. When a man's got all his fellows on strike or lock-out, it upsets him."

"Yes, Mr. Selwood," interposed Eve, "the poor fellow has been dreadfully worried lately. But it's all going to be right soon, I hope."

"I don't know," said Richard, cavalierly; "they're horribly obstinate."

Mrs. Glaire, who had been watching all this eagerly, while she made an appearance of listening to Dr. Purley's prattle, gave her son a grateful look, to which he replied with a smile and a nod, when a servant entered and announced the dinner.

Richard Glaire's smile and nod turned into a scowl and a twitch on hearing his mother's next words, which were—

"Mr. Selwood, will you take in my niece? Mr. Purley, your arm."

The vicar passed out with Eve, followed by the doctor and their hostess, leaving Richard to bring up the rear, which he did after snatching up a book and hurling it across the room crash into the flower-stand.

"She's mad," he muttered—"she's mad;" and then, grinding his teeth with rage, he followed into the dining-room.

Richard contrived to conceal his annoyance tolerably during the dinner, but his mother saw with secret satisfaction that he was thoroughly piqued by the way in which Eve behaved towards their visitor; and even with the effort he made over himself, he was not quite successful in hiding his vexation; while when they went out afterwards on to the croquet lawn, and the vicar and Eve were partners against him, he gave vent to his feelings by vicious blows at the balls, to the no slight damage of Mrs. Glaire's flowers.

This lady, however, bore the infliction with the greatest equanimity, sitting on a garden seat, knitting, with a calm satisfied smile upon her face, even though Eve looked aghast at the mischief that had been done.

Matters did not improve, for Richard, after being, to his great disgust, thoroughly beaten, and having his ball driven into all kinds of out-of-the-way places by his adversaries, found on re-entering the drawing-room that he was to play a very secondary part.

Eve recollected that Mr. Selwood could sing a little, and he sang in a good manly voice several songs, to which she played the accompaniment.

Then Eve had to sing as well, a couple of pretty ballads, in a sweet unaffected voice, and all this time the whist-table was waiting, and Richard pretending to keep up a conversation with the doctor, who enjoyed the music and did not miss his whist.

At length the last ballad was finished, tea over, and Richard had made his plans to exclude Eve from the whist-table, when he gnashed his teeth with fury, for his mother said—

"Eve, my dear, why don't you ask Mr. Selwood to try that duet with you?"

"What, the one Richard was practising, aunt?"

"Yes, my dear, that one."

"Oh, no," exclaimed the vicar. "If Mr. Glaire sings I will not take his place. Perhaps he will oblige us by taking his part with you."

"But Dick doesn't know it, Mr. Selwood," said Eve, laughing merrily, "and he's sure to break down. He always does in a song. Do try it."

Dick turned livid with rage, for this was more than he could bear, and, seeing his annoyance, Mr. Selwood pleasantly declined, saying—

"But I have an engagement on; I am to win some money of the doctor here for my poor people."

"Didn't know it was the correct thing to gamble to win money for charity."

"Oh, I often do," said the vicar, pleasantly. "Now, I'll be bound, Mr. Glaire, if I'd asked you for a couple of guineas to distribute, you'd think me a great bore."

"You may depend upon that," said Richard. "I never give in charity."

"But at the same time, you would not much mind if I won that sum from you at whist."

"You'd have to win it first," said Richard, with a sneer.

"Exactly," said the vicar; "and I might lose."

"There, don't talk," said Richard; "let's play. Come along, mamma."

Mrs. Glaire was about to excuse herself, but seeing her son's looks, she thought better of her decision, and to keep peace went up to the table; Eve saying she would look on.

It fell about then that the vicar and Mrs. Glaire were partners, and, as sometimes happens, Richard and his partner, the doctor, had the most atrocious of hands almost without exception. This, joined to the fact that Mrs. Glaire played with shrewdness and the vicar admirably, so disgusted Richard that at last he threw down the cards in a pet, vowing he would play no more.

"Well, it is time to leave off, really," said the vicar, glancing at his watch. "Half-past ten."

"Don't forget to give your winnings away in charity, parson," said Richard, in a sneering tone.

"Dick!" whispered Eve, imploringly.

"Hold *your* tongue," was the reply. "I know what I'm saying."

"No fear," said the vicar, good-temperedly, as he was bidding Mrs. Glaire good night; "shall I send you an account? Good night, Miss Pelly. Thanks for a delightful evening. Good night, Mr. Glaire."

He held out his hand, and gave Richard's a grip that made him wince, and then, after a few words in the hall, he was gone, with the doctor for companion.

"Thank goodness!" exclaimed Richard, savagely.

"Why, Dick, dear, how cross you have been," said Eve, while Mrs. Glaire watched the game.

"Cross! Enough to make one," he cried, angrily; and then, mimicking the vicar's manner, "Good night, Miss Pelly. Thanks for a delightful evening."

"Well, I'm sure it was, Dick," said Eve; "only you would be so cross."

"And well I might, when you were flirting in that disgraceful way all the evening."

"Oh, Dick!" exclaimed Eve, reproachfully; and the tears stood in her eyes.

"Well, so you were," he cried, "abominably. If anybody else had been here, they would have said that you were engaged to be married to that cad of a parson, instead of to me."

The tears were falling now as Eve laid her hand upon her cousin's shoulder.

"Dick, dear," she whispered, "don't talk to me like that; it hurts me."

"Serve you right," he growled.

"If I have done anything to annoy you to-night, dear, it was done in all innocence. But you don't—you can't mean it."

"Indeed, but I do," he growled, half turning his back.

Mrs. Glaire was sitting with her back to them, and still kept busy over her work.

"I am so sorry, Dick—dear Dick," Eve said, resting her head on the young man's shoulder. "Don't be angry with me, Dick."

"Then promise me you'll never speak to that fellow any more," he said, quickly.

"Dick! Oh, how can I? But there, you don't mean it. You are only a little cross with me."

"Cross!" he retorted; "you've hurt me so to-night that I've been wishing I'd never seen you."

"Oh, Dick!" she exclaimed, as she caught his hand, and raised it to her lips. "Please forgive me, and believe me, dear Dick, that I have not a single thought that is not yours. Please forgive me."

"There, hold your tongue," he said, shortly; "she's looking."

Poor little Eve turned away to hide and dry her tears, and then Mrs. Glaire, looking quite calm and satisfied with the prospect of events, said—

"Eve, my child, it is past eleven."

"Yes, aunt, I'm going to bed. Good night. Good night, Richard."

"Good night," he said, sulkily; and he bent down his head and brushed the candid white forehead offered to him with his lips, while, his hands being in his pockets, he at the same time crackled between his fingers a little note that he had written to Daisy, appointing their next interview, this arrangement having been forgotten in the hurry of the day's parting. As he spoke he was turning over in his mind how he could manage to get the note delivered unseen by Banks or his wife, for so far as he could tell at the moment, he had not a messenger he could trust.

CHAPTER XIX.

TO BULTITUDE'S AND BACK.

MATTERS did not improve at Dumford as the days went on, and Murray Selwood found that he could not have arrived at a worse time, so far as his own comfort was concerned, though he was bound to own that the occasion was opportune for his parish, inasmuch as he was able to be of no little service to many of the people, who, in a surly kind of way, acknowledged his help, and took it in a condescending manner, while, with a smile, he could

not help realising the fact that the sturdy independent folks looked down upon him as a kind of paid official whom they were obliged to suffer in their midst.

He had secured a servant with great difficulty, for the girls of the place, as a rule, objected to domestic service, preferring the freedom and independence of working for the line-growing farmers of the neighbourhood, and spending the money earned with the big draper of the place. Not our independent friends, but Barmby, the parish churchwarden, who coolly told the vicar that he could produce more effect upon the female population with a consignment of new hats or bonnets from town than a parson could with a month's preaching; and it must be conceded to Mr. Barmby that his influence was far more visible than that of his clerical superior.

All efforts to patch up a peace between the locked-out men and their employer were without avail, even though the vicar had seen both parties again and again.

"Let them pay for my machine-bands," said Richard Glaire—"Two hundred pounds, and come humbly and confess their faults, and I'll then take their application into consideration."

"But don't you think you had better make a greater concession?" said the vicar. "You are punishing innocent and guilty alike."

"Serve 'em right," said Richard, turning on his heel, and leaving the counting-house, where Mr. Selwood had sought him.

"What do you say, Mr. Banks?" said the vicar.

"Well, sir, what I say is this," said Joe, pulling out and examining a keen knife that he took from his pocket —"what I say is this, that he ought to find out whom this knife belongs to, and punish him."

"That knife?"

"Yes," said Joe, grimly. "I've been well over the place, and I found this knife lying on a bench. It is the one used for cootting the bands; there's the greasy marks on it. Now, the man as that knife belongs to," he said, closing the blade with a snap, "is him as coot the bands."

"By the way, did you ever find the bands?" said the vicar.

"Find 'em, parson, oh yes, I fun 'em; chucked into one of the furnaces they weer."

"And burnt?"

"Well, not exactly bunt, but so cockered up and scorched, as to be no more good. I only wish I knew who did it."

"It was a cowardly trick," said the vicar, "and I wish it were known, so that this unhappy strife might be stayed."

"Oh, that'll come raight soon," said Banks, drily. "Just wait till Master Dick has been over to the bank and seen how his book stands once or twice, and we'll soon bring this game to an end."

"And meanwhile the poor people are starving."

"Not they, sir," said Joe, with a chuckle. "People here are too saving. They'll hold out a bit longer yet."

Joe remained to smoke a pipe amongst the extinct forges, while the vicar paid a morning call at the big house, to find Mrs. Glaire and Eve gone for a walk, and Jacky Budd visible in the garden, fast asleep on a rustic chair, with the flies haunting his nose.

Turning from there he went down the street, and had to bow to Miss Purley, who was at the doctor's window, and to Miss Primgeon, who was at the lawyer's window, both ladies having been there ever since he passed. Then reaching the vicarage, it was to find that he had had a visitor in his turn in the shape of his churchwarden, Mr. Bultitude, "Owd Billy Bultitude," as he was generally called in the town, just outside which he had a large farm, and was reported to be very wealthy.

"Parish matters, I suppose," said the vicar; and he stood debating with himself for a few minutes as to whether he should go across the fields, ending by making a start, and coming across Richard Glaire deep in converse with Sim Slee, just by the cross-roads.

Something white was passed by Richard to the gentleman of the plaid waistcoat, as the vicar approached, and then they moved on together for a few yards, unaware of the coming footsteps.

"That looks like coming to terms," said the vicar to himself, joyfully. "Well, I'm glad of it," and he was

about to speak on the subject, when Richard started round with a scowl upon his countenance, and Slee thrust his hands into his pockets and went off whistling.

"As you will, master Dick," said the vicar to himself; "but I mean to try hard yet to get the whip hand of you, my boy." Then aloud, "What a delightful morning."

"Look here, Mr. Selwood," said Richard, roughly, "are you playing the spy upon my actions?"

"Not I," said the vicar, laughing, "I am going over to Bultitude's farm; I cannot help your being in the way. Good morning."

"He was watching me," muttered Dick, biting his nails. "I wonder whether he saw that note."

As he stood looking after the vicar, Sim Slee came softly back to wink in a mysterious way, and point with his thumb over his shoulder.

"They're all alike," he said—"all alike, parsons and all."

"What do you mean?" said Dick, roughly. "I thought you'd gone with that note."

"Thowt I wouldn't go yet," said Sim, with another confidential jerk of the thumb over the shoulder. "Joe Banks is sure to be at home now."

"I tell you he's down at the foundry, and will stay there all day," cried Dick, angrily.

"All raight: I'll go then," said Sim; "but I say, sir, they're all alike."

"What do you mean?"

"Why that parson—that dreadfully good man."

"Well, what about him?"

"Don't you know where he's gone?"

"Yes, he said: old Bultitude's."

"Did he say what for?" said Sim, grinning.

"No, of course not."

"Ho—ho—ho! Ho—ho—ho!" laughed Sim, stamping on the ground with delight. "Don't you see his game?"

"Curse you, speak out," cried Dick, furiously. "What do you mean?"

"Only that he's getting all the women under his thumb.

He'll be having crosses and candles in the chutch direckly, like the Ranby man."

"Curse you for a fool, Slee," cried Richard, impatiently; and he was turning away when Sim exclaimed—

"Don't you know as Miss Eve walked over there half-an-hour ago?"

"What?" roared Dick.

"Oh! she's only gone over to see Miss Jessie, of course; but if you'll light a cigar, sir, and sit down on yon gate, you'll see if he don't walk home with her. Now I'm off."

"Stop a moment, Sim," cried Dick, in a husky voice. "Have—have you ever seen anything?"

"Who? I? Oh, no! Nowt," said Sim; "leastwise I only saw 'em come out of Ranby Wood with a basket of flowers yesterday, that's all."

He went off then, chuckling to himself and rubbing his hands, leaving the poison to work, as, with his face distorted with rage, Dick started off at a sharp walk for Bultitude's farm; but, altering his mind, he leaped a stile, lit a cigar, and stood leaning against a tree smoking, unseen by any one who should pass along the lane, but able to command the path on both sides for some distance, up and down.

Meanwhile, the vicar, enjoying the pleasant walk, had been telling himself that he could always leave the grimy town and its work behind in a few minutes to enjoy the sweets of the country, which were here in all their beauty; and after thinking of Eve Pelly for about five minutes, he made a vigorous effort, uttered the word *taboo*, and began humming a tune.

Unfortunately for his peace of mind, the tune he inadvertently began to hum was one of those which Eve sang the other night, so he left off with a hasty "Pish!" and stooping down, began to botanize, picking a flower here and there, and then climbing up the rough side of the lane to cull a pretty little fern, whose graceful fronds drooped from a shadowy niche.

He threw the fern impatiently down, as he reached the path once more, and his brow furrowed, for memory told him directly that it was the pretty little *asplenium*, the peculiarities of whose growth he had explained to Eve

when he met her with Mrs. Glaire the day before, and had passed with them through Ranby Wood, the latter lady probably being too insignificant to be taken in by Mr. Sim Slee's comprehensive vision.

Walking rapidly on, to calm his thoughts, he came upon the object of his search, busily dragging a sheep out of a little narrow grip or drain that had been cut in the field, and into which the unfortunate animal had rolled feet uppermost, it's heavy wet fleece, and the size of the drain, making it impossible for the timid beast to extricate itself.

"Fahrweltered, parson," said the bluff-looking farmer, as he came up.

"I beg your pardon," said the vicar.

"Fahrweltered—fahrweltered," said the farmer, laughing; "we say in these parts a sheep's fahrweltered when he gets on his back like that. I expect," he continued, with a roguish twinkle of the eye, "you've found some of your flock fahrweltered by this time."

"Indeed, I have," said the vicar, laughing; "and so far the shepherd has not been able to drag them out."

"No, I s'pose not," said the farmer, carefully wiping his hands upon a big yellow silk handkerchief before offering one to be shaken. "You've got your work coot out, my lad, and no mistake. But come on up to the house, and have a bit of something. I come over to you about the meeting, and the books, and the rest of it."

The vicar followed him up to the farm-house, where the heavy stack-yard, abundant display of cattle, and noises of the yard told of prosperity; and then leading the way through the red-brick passage into the long, low, plainly-furnished sitting-room, the first words Murray Selwood heard were—

"Jess, Miss Pelly, I've brought you a visitor."

The vicar's cheek burned, as he could not help a start, but he recovered himself directly as he saw Eve Pelly's sweet face, with its calm unruffled look, and replied to the frank pressure of her hand, as she said she was delighted to see him.

"This is my niece, Jessie," said the farmer in his bluff way. "She says, parson——"

"Oh, uncle!" cried the pleasant, bright-faced girl.

"Howd your tongue, lass; I shall tell him. She says, parson, she's glad our old fogy is gone, for its some pleasure to come and hear you."

"Oh, Mr. Selwood, please," said the girl, blushing, "I didn't quite say that. Uncle does——"

"Zaggerate," said the old man, laughing. "Well, perhaps he does. But come, girl, get in a bit of lunch. There, what now, Miss Pelly; are we frightening you away?"

"Oh, no," said Eve, smiling, "only I must go now."

"Sit thee down, lass, sit thee down. Parson's going back directly, and he'll walk wi' thee and see thee safe home."

And so it came about that innocently enough an hour afterwards the vicar and Eve Pelly were walking back together with, as they came in sight of Richard Glaire, Eve eagerly speaking to her companion, and becoming so earnest in her pleading words for her cousin, that she laid one little hand on the vicar's arm.

"You will like him when you come to know him, Mr. Selwood," she was saying, in her earnest endeavour that Richard should be well thought of by everybody. "Poor boy, he has been so annoyed and worried over the strike, that he is not like the same. It is enough to make him cross and low-spirited, is it not?"

"Indeed it is," said the vicar, quietly; "and you may be quite at rest with respect to your cousin, for he will, for——he will always find a friend in me."

He had been about to say, "for your sake," but a glance at the sweet, candid face arrested his words, and he told himself that anything that would in the slightest degree tend to disturb her pure faith and belief in the man who was to be her husband would be cruelty, for there was the hope that her gentle winning ways and innocent heart would be the means of influencing Richard Glaire, and making him a better man.

"Hallo, you two!" made them start, as Richard leaped over the stile, and seemed surprised to find that neither of them looked startled or troubled at his sudden apparition. "Here, Eve, take my arm. I'm going home."

"Thank you, Dick," she said, quietly. "I have something to carry."

He scowled and relapsed into a moody silence, which no efforts on the vicar's part could break. Fortunately, the distance back to the town was very short, and so he parted from them at the foot of the High-street, the rest of the distance being occupied by Richard in a torrent of abuse of Eve, and invectives against the vicar, whom he characterized as a beggarly meddling upstart, and ended by sending the girl up to her room in tears.

CHAPTER XX.

AN EVENTFUL WALK.

Richard Glaire made the most of his short time for scolding, and sulked to a great extent with his cousin for the next few days, and then the tables were turned, for it came to pass one evening that all being bright and as beautiful without, as it was dull and cheerless within, Eve proposed to her aunt that they should take a walk as far as Ranby Wood.

"Do you expect to meet Mr. Selwood, Eve?" said Mrs. Glaire, rather bitterly.

The bitterness was, however, unnoticed by Eve, who replied quietly—

"Oh no, aunt dear. I don't think there is the slightest chance of that; for don't you remember he said he was going to dine with Doctor Purley?"

"To be sure, yes; I had forgotten," said Mrs. Glaire, somewhat relieved; though had she been asked she would have been puzzled to say why.

The result was that they started, leaving the town, crossing the little hill, and reaching the pleasant paths of the wood where the lichened trunks of the old oak trees were turned to russet gold in the setting sunshine, and all above seemed so peaceful and beautiful that the tears rose to Mrs. Glaire's eyes, and she sat down upon a fallen trunk, thinking of how beautiful the world was, and how it was marred by man, through whom came the major part of the troubles that annoyed them.

"What's that?" she exclaimed, hastily, as voices in angry contention approached.

"I don't know, aunt," said Eve, half-rising in alarm. "Let's go."

"No one will interfere with us, child," said Mrs. Glaire, restraining her. "It's Squire Gray's keeper and young Maine," she continued. "Why are they quarrelling?"

"I think I know, aunt," said Eve, in an agitated voice. "Oh, surely they don't mean to fight. It is about Jessie Bultitude: for Brough, the keeper, is always going to the farm with excuses, and it annoys John Maine."

It was very evident, though, that they were going to fight, for just then the keeper, a great black-whiskered fellow in velveteens and gaiters, exclaimed—

"Well, look here, I'll show you whether you've a raight to come across here. I 'ain't forgot about the rabbits."

As he spoke he began to strip off his coat, and his companion, a rather good-looking young fellow, whose face was flushed with passion, seemed disposed to imitate his example, when he caught sight of the ladies, and turned of a deeper red.

The keeper too resumed his coat, and whistling to his black retriever, who had been showing his teeth, and seemed disposed to join in the fray, he turned off into a side path and disappeared.

"Oh, John Maine!" exclaimed Eve, reproachfully, "what would Jessie think if she saw you quarrelling with that man?"

"Beg pardon, Miss, I'm sure," said the young man, pulling off his felt hat. "It was no seeking of mine. He's always trying to pick a quarrel with me. He is, indeed, Mrs. Glaire; and he won't be happy till he's been well thrashed. But hadn't you ladies—I mean—I beg your pardon, Miss Eve—hadn't you better go back out of the wood?"

"No, thank you, John," said Eve, smiling at the young man's confusion. "We have only just come."

"But it is getting damp, Miss," said the young fellow, who was foreman at Bultitude's farm.

"You didn't think it was damp the other night, John, when you were up here in the wood with Jessie."

"No, Miss, very true," said the young man; "but perhaps Thomas Brough will come back."

"Then," said Mrs. Glaire, quietly, "I should advise you to go back home at once, John."

"Well, if you will have it, you will," muttered the young man. "I did my best to stop it;" and with a rough salutation he went on his way.

"Eve, my dear, I should not go too often to Bultitude's," said Mrs. Glaire. "Jessie is very well, but she is rather below the station you are to take, and—quick—here, come away—this way."

She started up, and tried to drag Eve away, but she was too late; and her efforts to prevent the scene down the glade before them being seen by her young companion were in vain. For there, plainly visible in the golden glow, and framed as it were in the bower-like hazels, stood, with their backs to them, Richard Glaire and Daisy Banks.

The young couple were as motionless as those who gazed, for in an impetuous angry way, Eve had snatched herself free, and stood looking down the glade, while Mrs. Glaire seemed petrified.

The next moment though, just as she was about to whisper hastily to Eve something about an accidental meeting, they saw Richard pass his arm round Daisy, who, nothing loth, allowed the embrace, and then as his lips sought hers, she threw her arms round his neck and responded to his caress.

It was a long cooing kiss, and it might have been longer, but as Richard Glaire drew Daisy closer to him, he slightly changed his position, and raising his eyes from the pretty flushed face he saw that they were observed, and started back with an oath.

Daisy turned wonderingly, and then, seeing who was watching them, she uttered a faint cry, and ran off swiftly down the mossy pathway, while, after hesitating whether he should follow her or not, and with a red spot

of shame burning in each cheek, Dick took out his case, chose a cigar, nibbled off the end with an affectation of nonchalance, and striking a light, began to smoke.

"I shan't turn tail," he muttered. "I'm my own master, and I shall face it out."

"Oh aunt, aunt, aunt!" moaned Eve; "is that true?"

"True! yes," exclaimed Mrs. Glaire, in a low, angry voice.

"But Dick cannot—Oh aunt, aunt, take me home—take me home."

Poor Eve turned aside, sobbing bitterly, and covered her face with her hands to hide the hateful sight; but in vain, for there, as it were, standing out clear and bright before her, was Daisy Banks, with her soft, round little face and pouting lips, turned up to receive Richard Glaire's kisses; and to her it seemed so horrible, so impossible, that she could not believe it true. It came upon her like a sudden shock, and she was stunned; for with all Richard's ill-humour and extravagance, she could never believe him anything but true and honourable, and in her simple, trusting way, she asked herself if it was possible that there was a mistake.

"Give me your hand, child," said Mrs. Glaire, in a low, constrained voice; and catching that of Eve, with almost angry force, she led her on to where her son leaned nonchalantly against a tree, watching their coming.

The wood was now flooded with the rich golden sunset light, and every leaf and tree seemed turned to ruddy gold, while Dick, her young hero, the man she loved, and who was to be her husband, seemed to Eve, seen through a veil of tears, more handsome than ever she had seen him before.

And he did not love her! His love was given to Daisy Banks! Oh, no, she told herself; it was not true—it was some mistake; and with her breath coming in sobs, and her heart beating rapidly, she clung to her aunt's hand as they approached.

Mrs. Glaire stopped short when they reached the tree, and speaking in a very cold, contemptuous way, she raised her one hand at liberty, and pointing in the direc-

tion in which one of the two actors in the little comedy had fled, she said—

"Is this my son Richard?"

"No," said Dick, with a forced laugh, and with a display of effrontery far from in keeping with his abject looks, "No—that was Daisy Banks."

"I say, is this my son?" exclaimed Mrs. Glaire, speaking in the same cold measured way.

"I suppose so," said Dick, contemptuously. "There, don't make a bother out here in the woods;" and he half-turned away to gaze up towards where a thrush was loudly singing its farewell to the day.

"I say is this my son?" reiterated Mrs. Glaire, "who promised me upon his word of honour as a gentleman that he would see Daisy Banks no more."

"Oh aunt," cried Eve, with almost a shriek of pain, as these words were to her like the lifting of a veil, "did you know of this?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Glaire, sternly, "I knew, my child, that he was playing false to you, and that he was often seeing this miserable girl."

"There, let her alone," said Richard, defiantly.

"I knew it, Eve," continued Mrs. Glaire, speaking with suppressed anger; "but on my remonstrating, he promised me that it should all be at an end, and for the time, like a weak, foolish mother, I believed in his honour as a gentleman, and that he would keep his word to me and be faithful to you. You see how he keeps his word."

"There, that'll do," cried Richard, defiantly. "I'm not going to be bullied. I like the girl, and shall marry her if I choose."

"Liar! Coward!" exclaimed Mrs. Glaire. "You would not marry her: but break the miserable girl's heart, as you would break that of your cousin, if I would stand by and see you do the wrong."

"Oh no, no, no, aunt—aunt—pray don't," sobbed Eve, interposing. "You are hard upon dear Dick, aunt. He does not care for her; it is some mistake. He cannot care for her. It is Daisy's doing; the wicked girl has led him away. Dick, dear Dick, tell me, tell me, you

don't love her, that—that—Oh, Dick, it can't—it can't be true."

She threw herself sobbing on his breast, but with a degree of force, hardly to be expected from her, Mrs. Glaire drew Eve away and stood between them.

"No," she exclaimed, "he shall not touch you; he shall never touch you again till this disgrace is wiped away, and he has shown himself in some way worthy of your love; for I will not stand by and see your future blasted by the action of a son who has proved himself a scoundrel."

"Look here, mother," cried Richard, hotly, "I'm not going to stand all this. You want me to marry Eve, and I shall marry her some day; but if I choose to be a bit gay first I shall. I'm my own master and shall do as I like."

"Worse and worse!" exclaimed Mrs. Glaire, whose voice was now an angry whisper. "Not one blush of shame—not one word of sorrow or humility before the pure, sweet, forgiving girl, whose feelings you have outraged. I ask myself again—as I could almost say, thank God your father is not alive to know it!—is this my son?"

"There, confound your heroics!" exclaimed Richard, impatiently.

"You say I want you to marry Eve, and that some day you will," continued Mrs. Glaire. "Disabuse your mind, Richard, for I do not wish you to marry Eve, and marry her you shall not."

"There, that'll do," cried Richard; "I've had enough of this. Here, come along with me, Evey. I'll walk home with you and explain all."

He tried to take Eve's hand, to draw through his arm, but she drew back from him, looking cold and pale, while her eyes dilated, and she shuddered slightly.

"Here, walk home with me, you little silly," he continued.

"No—no—no," said Eve, slowly, as she turned from him, and clinging to Mrs. Glaire's arm, she hid her face upon her aunt's shoulder, as in those few moments her girlhood's innocent belief and trust in her cousin passed

away, and with the eyes of a woman she for the first time saw him in his true character.

"As you like," said Richard, flippantly, and assuming an injured tone. "You'll be sorry for this."

No one answered him, for Mrs. Glaire drew Eve's arm through hers, and without a word they walked hastily home.

"Damn it all?" exclaimed Richard, taking the cigar from his mouth, and throwing it impatiently down. "How cursedly unlucky. Well, I don't care: they must have known it some day. Evey will soon forget it all, and I shall easily get round the old woman with a bit of coaxing. Now where's little Daisy?"

He walked hastily down the path by which she had fled, knowing only too well that it led farther into the wood, and feeling sure that he should find her waiting for him to join her.

He was quite right, for before long he came upon her, sitting down and crying as though her heart would break.

"Hallo! little pet," he cried; and she started up in a frightened way at his words, "what have you got to cry about? I'm the one that ought to bellow. See what a wigging I've had."

"Oh, Mr. Richard!" sobbed Daisy.

"There, *Mister* Richard again," he cried, catching her in his arms.

"Then Dick, dear Dick, there must be no more of this; I shall never be able to hold my face up in the place again."

"Stuff!" he cried, "come along."

"No, no," she sobbed. "I'm going straight home, now."

"Just as you like," he said, cavalierly, and he took out his cigar-case.

"Don't be angry with me, Dick, please; for I'm so unhappy," sobbed the girl.

"You've got nothing to be unhappy about, I'm sure," he said. "It's only what I told you. The old woman won't stand it, and we shall have to make a bolt. You see it now yourself."

"Ah, but father—mother, Dick."

"They'll soon come round, like my old lady will."

"But I couldn't go, Dick, dear Dick. Do pray speak to father."

"Not I," said the young fellow, coolly.

"Then let me, pray let me."

"No, nor I shan't let you do that neither. He won't mind; and I'm not going to be talked to and patted on the back and that sort of stuff. If you love me as you say you do, you'll listen to what I say."

Daisy looked at him uneasily, and then turned away her face, sobbing to herself, "Oh, dear."

"Now then," continued Dick, "let's finish our walk."

"No, no," sobbed Daisy, "I must go back home now."

"Not yet you won't," he said, angrily.

"But indeed, indeed I must, Dick, dear Dick. Pray don't speak crossly to me."

"You get worse and worse," he said. "There's always some silly excuse ready."

"But I must—indeed I must go home now, Dick," cried Daisy, imploringly.

"And I say you shan't yet," said the young man, half angrily, half laughing; and then—"Curse it—there's that Tom Podmore again, with young Maine. Did you know he was coming?"

"No, no: indeed no," cried the girl, reproachfully.

"He's always watching us," cried Richard, and catching Daisy's arm, he walked with her rapidly down a path leading to one of the outlets of the wood, where they parted, Daisy hurrying home to be received with a quiet nod by her father, who was just going out, while her mother looked at her curiously as she went to take off her things.

CHAPTER XXI.

BANKS'S OBSTINACY.

Joe Banks made his way straight through the place to the big house, where, on knocking at the front door, it was evident that he was expected, the girl saying quietly—

"Missus will see you in her room, Mr. Banks."

"All raight, my lass," said Joe; and he followed the girl into a little room off the hall, where the walls were ornamented with maps and patterns, and shelves bearing rough account books, while here and there stood a dingy-looking wooden model of some piece of machinery.

"Evening, mum," said Joe, quietly. "I've come, as you sent for me; but it ain't no use. Things are just where they weer, and unless Master Dick comes down, the works will keep shut."

"I didn't send for you about that," said Mrs. Glaire, hastily.

"No!" said Joe, quietly.

"No," said Mrs. Glaire, clearing her throat and speaking rather excitedly. "You know I spoke to you once before, Joe Banks, about—about——"

"There, don't beat about, Missus," said Joe, with a happy smile spreading over his countenance. "I know, about Master Dick and my Daisy."

"Yes," said Mrs. Glaire, "and I spoke to my son about it."

"Did you?" chuckled Joe. "Well, I never spoke a word to my gal."

"I spoke to my son," continued Mrs. Glaire, "and pointed out the impossibility and impropriety of his proceedings."

"Did you, though?" chuckled Joe. "Why, lor' a mercy, Missus, what's the good o' being so proud? Flesh and blood's flesh and blood all the world over."

"I talked to him earnestly upon the point," said Mrs. Glaire, not heeding the interruption.

"Theer, theer," said Joe, smiling. "What good was it? why did you do it?"

"And my son saw the force of my remarks, and gave me his promise that he would see Daisy no more."

"Ah, he did, did he?" chuckled Joe. "He promised you that?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Glaire, angrily; "and he has broken his promise."

"Of course he has," said Joe, chuckling. "You might ha' known it. When a young couple like them comes together, it's no use for the old uns to try and stop it.

They'll manage it somehow. They're sure to be too many for you."

"Joe Banks, you put me out of patience," cried Mrs. Glaire, angrily. "Can you not see how important this matter is?"

"Important? Of course I do," said Joe, quietly, "a very important step for both of 'em."

"Listen!" cried Mrs. Glaire; "things are coming to a crisis, and for your sake they must be stopped."

"Strikes me," said Joe, bluntly, "that you're thinking a vast more of yourself, Missus Glaire, than of me."

"I'm thinking of the future of my son and of your daughter, Mr. Banks," said Mrs. Glaire.

"So am I," said Joe, quietly; "but you're so proud."

"I tell you, man, that I met them this evening together in the wood," cried Mrs. Glaire. "My son, with Daisy, your child, in his arms."

"Ah, you did, did you, Missus?" said Joe, chuckling. "He was kissing of her, I suppose."

"Yes," exclaimed Mrs. Glaire, indignantly.

"Well, I thought as much," said Joe, quietly. "The lass had got a rare red face when I met her as she come in."

"Do you hear what I say?" cried Mrs. Glaire, angrily. "I say I saw them to-night in the wood, after he had promised me to give her up."

"Oh, yes," said Joe, in a calm, unruffled way; "I heard you say so, and if you'd been in the wood every day for the past month, I'd bet you'd ha' sin 'em. They're often theer."

"Joe Banks!" cried Mrs. Glaire, half rising from her chair.

"Theer, theer, Missus, what's the good o' making a fuss, and being so proud? I've give my Daisy a good eddication, and she's quite a scholard. She can write as pretty a letter as any one need wish to see, and keeps accounts beautiful."

"Joe Banks, you are blind," cried Mrs. Glaire, passionately. "I want to save your child from shame, and you——"

"Howd hard theer—howd hard theer, Missus," cried

Joe, rising; and his rugged face flushed up. "I respect you, Missus Glaire, like a man, and I don't wonder as it touches your pride a bit, but I won't sit here and hear you talk like that theer. My Daisy's as good and honest a girl as ever stepped, and I'd troost her anywheers; while, as to your son, he's arbitrary, but you've browt him up as a gentleman, and do you think I'm going to believe he means harm by my darling? No, no, I know better."

"But, you foolish man——"

"Missus Glaire, I won't call you a foolish woman; I've too much respect for you; but I think so, and I think as it isn't me as is blind, but some one else. Theer, theer, what's the good of kicking again it. They've made up their minds to come together, and you may just as well let 'em by the gainest coot, as send 'em a long ways round. But, theer, Missus, don't think like that of your own flesh and blood. Why, Missus, am I to respect your son more than you do yoursen?"

"Dick has deceived me," cried Mrs. Glaire, with the tears running down her cheeks.

"Well, but it won't anser," said Joe, calming down. "He's fond o' the lass, and he was standing 'tween her and you," he continued, smiling at his own imagery. "You was pulling one way and she was pulling the other, and young love pulled the strongest. Of course it did, as was very natural."

"Will you send Daisy away, and try and stop it?" cried Mrs. Glaire, angrily.

"No, I won't do neither," said Joe, stoutly. "Why should I? What call is there for me to go again my master and make my lass miserable, because you think she ain't good enough for your boy?"

"Then I must act, Joe Banks," said Mrs. Glaire, "for see her he shall not."

"Theer, theer, what can you do?" chuckled Joe. "Better let things go their own way."

"I tell you, man, that for your daughter's sake, you ought to put a stop to this."

"I can't stop it," said Joe, smiling; "nor no one else. You tried, and found you couldn't, so what could I do?

Let 'em alone, and my Daisy shan't disgrace you; and look here, if it's money, I've got a thousand pounds saved up, and it's all hers. Theer!"

"Man, man, what can I say to you?" said Mrs. Glaire, checkmated by the obstinate faith of Banks in her son.

"Nowt," said Joe, sturdily; "what's the good o' talking? Take my advice, Missus Glaire—let things bide."

Mrs. Glaire wrung her hands in despair as she gazed enviously in the frank, bluff workman's face, and wished that she could feel the same calm trust in the boy who had been her sole thought for so many years, and as she gazed Joe Banks said, sturdily:

"Look here, Missus, no offence meant; but they do say as marriages is made in heaven."

"Yes, Joe, marriages," exclaimed Mrs. Glaire, passionately.

"Well, I weer a-talking about marriages," said Joe, quietly; "so you take my advice and let things bide."

"You will not take my advice, Banks," exclaimed Mrs. Glaire. "But, look here, I have warned you, I have begged of you to help me, and you refuse."

"O' course I do," said Joe Banks, sturdily. "I'm not going to fight again my own flesh and blood on a question o' position. Look here," he continued, now speaking angrily, "I never was jealous of my old master's rise in life, and I stuck to him and helped him, and he made me promise to stick by and help his son; and that I'm going to do, for I don't believe if he'd been alive he'd ha' been owt but pleased to see his boy make up to my gal. It ain't my seeking: it's master Dick's. He loves she, and she loves he, and before I'll step 'twixt 'em, and say as one workman's son's too big for the other workman's daughter, I'll be——. No, I won't, not before you, Missus; and now good night, and I wish the strike well ended."

Joe Banks swung out of the room with all the sturdy independence of a man with a thousand pounds of his own, and then made his way home, while Mrs. Glaire sat as it were stunned.

"What can I do? What can I do?" she muttered;

and then sat thinking till Eve, looking very pale and ill, walked softly into the room, and knelt by her side, turning up her sad face and red eyes to those of the troubled mother.

"Aunt, dear," she whispered, "Dick has just come in, and gone up to his room. Shall we ask him to come down to us?"

"What for?" said Mrs. Glaire, sharply.

"Don't you think, Aunt, we ought to try and forgive him, and win him back?"

Mrs. Glaire rose slowly, and went to a side table, from which she took a Prayer-book, and read from it a sentence beginning, "I will arise," to the end; and then, laying down the book, she took Eve's head between her hands, and kissed her white forehead gently.

"Eve, my child, yes, we ought to try and forgive him; I, for his cruel deceit of the woman who gave him birth; you, for his outrage against the woman who was to be his wife. I will forgive him, but he must come—he must arise and come, and seek for pardon first. While you——"

"Oh, Aunt, Aunt," moaned Eve, hiding her face in the elder's breast, "I never knew before how much I loved him."

"And you forgive him, child?"

"Yes, Aunt, I forgive," said Eve, raising her head, and looking sadly in the elder woman's face, "I forgive him, but——"

"But what, my child?"

"All that is past now—for ever."

Mrs. Glaire did not speak for a few moments, but stood holding her niece's hand, looking straight away from her into vacancy, while from above there floated slowly down and entered the room the penetrating fumes of the cigar Dick was smoking in his bedroom, as with his heels upon the table, and a glass of spirits and water by his side, he amused himself by reading a French novel, growling every now and then as he came across some idiom or local phrase which he could not make out, and apparently quite oblivious of the fact that three women were making themselves wretched on his behalf.

Suddenly a low whistle was heard, and Mrs. Glaire started.

"What was that?" she exclaimed.

Eve made no reply, but the two women remained listening, while it seemed to them that the sound had also been heard by Dick, who apparently crossed the room, and opened his window.

"He has gone to see what it means," said Mrs. Glaire in a whisper. "I hope the strike people are not out."

Her head was running upon certain proceedings that had taken place many years before, during her husband's lifetime, when they had literally been besieged; but her alarm was unnecessary, for had she been in her son's bedroom, she would have seen that worthy open his window and utter a loud cough, with the result that Sim Slee threw up a note attached to a stone, which the young man glanced at, and then said, "All right; no answer," and Slee went quickly off.

Richard opened the note, glanced through it, and read passages half aloud.

"H'm, h'm. So sorry to leave you as I did.— Heart very sore.— Oughtn't to meet like that any more.— Pray let her tell father.— They would soon agree if all known.— Will not come any more to be deceitful."

"Won't you, my dear?" said Dick, aloud. "We'll see about that. I think I can turn you round my finger now, Miss Daisy. If not I'm very much mistaken. But we'll see."

He finished the note by twisting it up and using it to re-light his cigar, which he sat smoking, and listening as at last he heard his mother and Eve pass his room on their way to bed—the former for the first time in his life without saying "Good night" to her son.

CHAPTER XXII.

JOHN MAINE'S HEADACHE.

"HALLO, Johnny!"

"What, my lively boy."

"Look at his velveteens."

"And a silk hankercher too. Arn't he tip-top?"

"Arn't you down glad to see your old mates again, Johnny?"

"Course he is; look at the tears in his eyes."

"Hey, mun, why don't you say you're glad to see us?"

"And why don't you speak?"

"Because," said John Maine, speaking slowly, as he stopped leaning on his thick staff in the middle of the road, "I'm not glad to see you, and I don't want to speak."

He looked very stern and uncompromising this young man, half bailiff, half farm servant in appearance, as he stood there in the lane, about a mile from Joe Banks's house, and facing the men who had kept up the conversational duet, for they were about as ill-looking a pair of scoundrels as a traveller was likely to meet in a day's march.

The elder of the two carried a common whip, and wore a long garment, half jacket, half vest in appearance, inasmuch as it was backed and sleeved with greasy fustian, and faced with greasy scarlet and purple plush, hanging low over his tightly-fitting cord trousers, buttoned at the ankles over heavy boots, while his head was covered with a ragged fur cap.

The younger man, whose hair was very short, wore the ordinary smock-frock euphoniously termed a "cow-gown," but as he was journeying, it was tucked up round his hips. This, with his soft wideawake, and heavy unlaced boots, was bucolic enough, but there the rustic aspect ceased, for his face was sallow; he had a slovenly tied cotton handkerchief round his neck; and as he smoked a dirty, short clay pipe, he had more the aspect of a Whitechapel or Sheffield rough than the ordinary farming man of the country.

Taking them together, they seemed to be men who could manage a piece of horse-stealing, poach, rob a henroost, or pay a visit night or day to any unprotected house; and if "gaol" was not stamped legibly on each face, it was because nature could not write it any plainer than she had.

"He's gotten high in the instep, Ike," said the last man; "and what's he got to be proud on?"

"Ah, to be sure, what's he got to be proud on?" chuckled the other. "He wasn't always a stuck up one, was he?"

"I say, Johnny," said the first speaker, "keep that dog o' yourn away wilt ta, or I might give him something as wouldn't do him no good."

"Here, Top, down dog!" said the young man, and a rough-looking dog which had been snuffing round the two strangers showed his teeth a little and then lay down in the dusty road. "I don't want," continued the young man, "to be rough on men I used to know."

"Rough, lad; no, I should think not," said Ike, of the whip; and he gave it a lash, cutting off the heads of some nettles. "I knew he was all raight, Jem."

"I said," continued the young man, "that I didn't want to be surly to men as I used to know, and if you want a shilling or two to help you on the road, here they are. As for me, I've dropped all your work, and taken to getting an honest living."

"Oh, ho, ho!" laughed Ike, of the whip, giving it another flick, and making the dog jump. "Dost ta hear that, Jem?"

"Ay, lad, I hear him," said Jem, of the smock-frock, hugging himself as if afraid to lose what he considered particularly good; "I'm hearing of him. But come along, John; we won't be hard on such a honest old boy. Show us the way to the dram-shop, or the nearest public, and we'll talk old times over a gill or two o' yale."

"You are going one way, I'm going the other," said John Maine, uneasily, for just then Tom Podmore passed him, with big Harry, both of whom stared hard, nodded to him, and went on.

"Just hark at him, Ike," said Jem. "He's a strange nice un, he is. Why, I'm so glad to see him that if he goes off that-a-way I shall stop in Dumford and ask all about him, and where he lives and what he's a doing."

John Maine turned cold, while the perspiration stood upon his forehead, for just then Sim Slee came along in the other direction, eyed the party all over, and evidently took mental notes of what he saw.

"What is it you want of me?" said the young man, hoarsely.

"Want, lad?" said Ike; "we don't want nowt of him, do we, Jem? We're only so glad to see an old mate again, that we don't know hardly how to bear it."

"That's it, Ike," said Jem. "And don't you think as he's stuck up, mind you. See how glad he is to see his owd mates again. Say, Johnny, 'It's my delight of a shiny night,' eh?"

"Hush!" exclaimed John Maine, starting.

"All right," said Jem. "Got a pipe o' bacco 'bout you?"

John Maine took a tobacco-pouch from his pocket, and held it out to the speaker, who refilled his dirty pipe, looked the pouch all over, and then transferred it to his pocket.

"Look here, Ike," said the fellow then, "we won't keep Johnny any longer. He's off out courting—going to see his lass. Don't you see the bood in his button-hole. He'll see us again when he comes to look us up, for we shall pitch down in one of the pooblics."

"Raight you are, lad; he'll find us out. Do anything now, Johnny? Ought to be a few hares and fezzans about here. Good-bye, Johnny, lad; give my love to her."

The two men went off laughing and talking, leaving John Maine gazing after them, till they disappeared round a bend of the lane on the way to Dumford, when brushing the perspiration from his face with one hand, he staggered away, kicking up the dust at every step till he reached a stile, upon which he sank down as if the elasticity had been taken out of his muscles. His head went down upon his hands, his elbows upon his knees, and there he remained motionless, with the dog sitting down and watching him intently, after trying by pawing and whining to gain his master's attention

Neither John Maine nor his ill-looking companions had gone far, before a head and shoulders were raised slowly up over the hedge, so that their owner could peer over and look up and down the lane. The countenance revealed was that of Thomas Brough, the keeper, who had

evidently been sitting on the other side, partaking of his rural lunch, or dinner; for as he parted the green growth, to get a better view, it was with a big clasp knife, while his other hand held a lump of bread, ornamented with bacon.

He spoke the next moment with his mouth full, but his words were quite audible as he said:—

"I thowt that thar dog would ha' smelt the rat, but a didn't. So I hadn't got you now, Jack Maine, hadn't I? I'm a rogue, am I, Jack? I sold the Squire's rabbuds, did I? and pocketted t' money, did I? Wires, eh? Fezzans and hares, eh? Now, what'll old Bultitude and Miss Jess say to this? I'll just find out what's your little game."

He strode hastily off, parting the hazels, and making a short cut across the copse, while John Maine sat on the stile thinking.

What was he to do—what was he to do? Were all his struggles to be an honest man to be in vain? Yes, he had joined parties in poaching, down about Nottingham, but he had left it all in disgust, and for years he had been trying to be, and had been, an honest man. He had lived here at Dumford four years—had saved money—was respected and trusted—he was old Bultitude's head man; and now these two scoundrels—men who knew of his old life—had found him out, they would expose him, and he should have to go off right away and begin the world afresh.

"I've tried enew; I've tried very hard," he groaned. "I left all that as soon as I saw to what it tended, and knew better; and now, after all this struggle, here is the end."

What was the use? he asked himself; why had he tried? What were honesty and respectability, and respect to such as he, that he should have fought for them so hard, knowing that, sooner or later, it must come to this?

What should he do? The words kept repeating themselves in his brain, and he asked himself again, What?

Suppose he told them all at the farm—laid bare the whole of his early life, how he had found himself as a boy

thrown among poachers. It had been no fault of his, for he had hated it—loathed it all. Suppose he told Mr. Bultitude—what then?

Yes, what then? Old Bultitude would say—"We're all very sorry for you here, but if it got about that I'd kept a regular poacher on my farm, what would the squire say? And what about my lease?" And Tom Brough! Good heavens, if Tom Brough should learn it all!

It was of no use; that man would blast his character gladly, and the end of it all was that he must go!

Yes, but where? Where should he go? Somewhere to work for awhile, and get on, and then live a life of wretchedness, expecting to see some old associate turn up and blast his prospects. No; there was no hope for such as he! All he could do was to join some regiment at Lincoln or Sheffield, enlist—get on foreign service, and be a soldier. A man did not want a character to become a good soldier.

And about Jessie?

His head went lower, and he groaned aloud as this thought flashed across his mind, for his load seemed more than he could bear.

"Anything the matter, John Maine?"

The young man leaped up to find himself face to face with Mr. Selwood, whose steps had been inaudible in the dusty road, and John Maine's thoughts had been too much taken up for him to notice the whine of recognition by the dog, who had leaped up and ran forward to welcome the vicar.

"Bit of a headache, sir, bad headache—this heat, sir," stammered the young man.

"Liver out of order—liver—not a doubt about it," said the vicar. "What a strange thing it is nature couldn't make a man without a liver and save him all his sufferings from bile. Come along with me to the Vicarage. I'm getting in order there now, and I'll doctor you, and go and tell Mr Purley myself that I've been poaching on his preserves. Why, what's the matter, man?"

John Maine had started as if stung at certain of his latter words.

"Bit giddy, sir; strange and bad now it's come on," he stammered.

"That's right; you're better now. Sitting with your head down. I'll doctor you—no secrets; tincture of rhubarb, citrate of magnesia, and a little brandy. I'll soon set you right. You musn't be ill. This is cricket night, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir; but they haven't played since the strike."

"Perhaps they will to-night, and I shall come to the field. Well, come along."

"But really, sir—I—that is—"

"Now look here, John Maine, I'm the spiritual head of the parish, and you must obey me. I can't help being a man of only your own age—I shall get the better of that. Now if I had been some silver-headed old gentleman, you would have come without a word, so come along. I'll go back. You are decidedly ill—there's no mistake about it."

To John Maine's great surprise, the vicar took his arm, and half led him back towards Dumford, chattering pleasantly the while.

"I met Mr. Simeon Slee as I came along, and he cut me dead. He's a very nice man in his way, but I'm afraid he works so hard with his tongue, it takes all the strength out of his arms."

"He's strange and fond o' talking, sir," said John Maine.

"Yes; but words are only words after all, and if they are light and chaffy, they don't grow like good grain. Bad thing this strike in the town, Maine. Lasted a month now."

"Very bad, sir."

"Ah, yes. You agricultural gentlemen don't indulge in those luxuries, and I'm glad to see that the farm people are very sober."

"Yes, sir, 'cept at the stattice and the fair."

"Stattice?" said the vicar, inquiringly.

"Yes, sir, status—statute-hiring, you know, when the servants leave. They call it 'pag rag' day here."

"Ha, do they?" said the vicar; "well I suppose I shall learn all in time. What may 'pag rag' mean?"

"They call it so here, sir," said the young man, smiling. "They say a man pags a sack on his back, and I suppose it means they carry off their clothes then."

"I see," said the vicar; "and you have some strange characters about at such times? By the way, I saw a nice respectable couple turn in at the Bull and Cucumber, as I came by. They'd got poacher stamped on their faces plainly.—Head bad?"

"Sudden stab, sir, that's all," said John Maine, holding his hands to his head and shuddering.

"Ah, you must go back and lie down as soon as I have done with you, or else I must find you a sofa for an hour. We'll see how you are. Perhaps we'll walk home together."

"No, no, sir, I shall be all right directly. Don't do that, sir. Mr. Bultitude——"

"Mr. Bultitude has too much respect for you, John Maine, to let you go about in a state of suffering; so just hold your tongue, sir, for you're my patient."

A few minutes after he laid his hand on the gate, with the effect of making Jacky Budd start up from his seat on the bottom of a large flower-pot, and begin vigorously hoeing at some vegetables in the now trim garden.

The vicar saw him and laughed to himself, as he led the way up to the door, glancing up the street as he did so, and seeing, with a feeling of uneasiness, that there were knots of men standing about in conversation, as if discussing some important subject.

The door stood wide open, as if inviting entrance, and flowers were now blooming in profusion on every side, for what with the rough work of Tom Podmore and Big Harry, supplemented by the efforts of Jacky Budd and the parson himself, the garden was what the sexton called a "pictur."

"Come in here, Maine," said the vicar, opening the door of his study; and the young man followed, peering round as he did so, for this was his first visit to the vicar's dwelling, and the result of a month's residence was shown in the change that had come over the place.

But at the end of the first fortnight, one of Mr. Bultitude's waggons had been run down to the station three

times to fetch "parson's traps," and "parson's traps" were visible on all sides, the Reverend Murray Selwood being, to use his own words, "rather cursed with wealth."

The place was now the *beau ideal* of a well-to-do bachelor's home. The low-roofed entrance-hall was bright with oak furniture, quaint china, trophies of old arms, and savage weapons, with flowers, for the most part sent by Mrs. Glaire, placed wherever there was light and sunshine for them to break up into long sheaves on the clean stone floor. Through an open door could be seen the dining-room, whose oaken sideboard was half covered with massive plate, college cups, and trophies won by muscular arms and legs guided by a clear-thinking and solid brain; but the study itself took John Maine's attention, with its cases full of books, great bronze clock, and vases on the mantel-piece, with statuettes on brackets.

There were traces of the owner's polished taste in every direction, but at the same time samples of his love of outdoor sports. For instance, in one corner there stood a polished canoe-paddle with a fascine of fishing-rods; in another corner a gun-case and a couple of cricket-bats; lying on a side-table, its handle carefully bound with string, was about the biggest croquet mallet that ever drove ball over a velvet lawn. A half-written sermon lay on the writing-table, and by it a cigar-box; while on the chimney-piece and in brackets were pipes, from the humble clay, through briars, to the tinted brown meerschaum with its amber tube. The greatest incongruity in the place, however, seeing that it was the snuggery of a man of peace, was a trophy of single-sticks, foils, masks and gloves, crossed by a couple of bows, in front of which were a sheaf of arrows and two pairs of boxing-gloves.

"Looking at the gloves, Maine?" said the vicar, smiling. "Ah, I used to be a bit of a don with those at one time. You and I will put them on together some day. Just touch that bell."

John Maine obeyed, while the young vicar found his keys, and opened a cabinet which was in two compartments, the one displaying a regular array of medicines, the other spirits, wine, and glasses.

"Bring in some water, Mrs. Slee," said the vicar.

"And a sponge and a rag and the ragiack oil?" said Mrs. Slee, eagerly.

"No, Mrs. Slee. It's medicine, not surgery to-day;" and the woman backed out, looking a little less angular and sad than a few weeks before.

"I'm a regular quack, Maine, you see," said the vicar, smiling, as he poured into a great soda-water glass a certain quantity of tincture, added to it a couple of tablespoonfuls of brandy, and so much granulated magnesia, to which, when Mrs. Slee returned, he poured about half a pint of pure cold well water. "There's a dose for you, my man," he said, as he passed it to John Maine, "that will set you right in an hour. Now, Mrs. Slee, any one been?"

"Yes, Bulger's girl 's been here with a bottle for some wine," said Mrs. Slee, shortly, for "sir" and a respectful tone were still strangers to her tongue.

"Bring the bottle in. Any one else?"

"Maiden's boy says you promised his mother some tea."

"So I did," said the vicar, opening a large canister, from which he took a packet which scented the room with its fragrance. "There it is. Now then, who else?"

"Old Mumby's wife has come for some more wine."

"Then she'll go back without it, Mrs. Slee. Do you see that?" he continued, giving her a strange look; "that's the peculiar sign that used to be in vogue amongst the ancients. That's the gnostic wink, Mrs. Slee, and means too much. I won't send a spoonful. That wicked old woman drank every drop of the last herself, Mrs. Slee, I'll make affidavit. She wouldn't stir across the room to wait on her poor old husband, and yet she'll come nearly a mile to fetch that wine. I'll take it myself, and give it the poor old boy, and see him drink it before I come away. Tell her I'll bring it down, Mrs. Slee; but don't say I called her a wicked old woman."

"Oh, I'm not going to chatter. Do you think I should be such a ghipes?" said Mrs. Slee, rudely.

"Not knowing what a ghipes is, I cannot say, Mrs. Slee," said the vicar; "but you are not perfect, Mrs. Slee —not perfect. Soup. You have that last soup on your conscience!"

"Well, I'm sure I should ha' been glad on a few not long back, and it was quite good enew to gie away to people."

"And I'm sure it was not, Mrs. Slee: the poor people are hungry, and want food. This strike's a terrible thing."

"Then they shouldn't strike," growled Mrs. Slee.

"I quite agree with you, Mrs. Slee, so I don't give soup to the men who did strike, but the women and children did not strike, and if you knew what it was to be hungry——I beg your pardon, Mrs. Slee," he added hastily, as he saw his housekeeper flush up. "There, I did not think. But this soup. We had a capital French cook at my college, and he gave me lessons. I'm a capital judge of soup, and I'll taste the fresh. Bring me in a basin, and send these people away."

Mrs. Slee muttered and went out, looking rather ungracious, and the vicar turned to his guest, who was fidgeting about and seemed rather uneasy.

"I'm rather proud of our soup here at the vicarage—broth, the people call it," said the vicar.

"I've heerd tell of it, sir," said John Maine, who wanted to go.

"But I have hard work to keep the water out. I tell Mrs. Slee that the people can add as much of that as they like. But, I say, Maine, there's something wrong with you!"

"Oh, no, sir; nothing at all, sir; but it's time I was going, sir, if you'll excuse me."

"Well, well, good-bye, Maine. I hope," he added significantly, "your head will be better. Mind this, though, I'm not one of the confessional parsons, and insist upon no man's confidence; but bear this in mind, I look upon myself as the trusted, confidential friend of every man in the parish. I shall be over your way soon."

"Thank you kindly, sir," said Maine. "I know you do;" and, backing out, the next moment he was gone.

"Strange young man that—strange people altogether," said the vicar. "Oh, here's the soup."

For just then Mrs. Slee bustled in with a napkin-

covered tray, bearing a basin and spoon, the former emitting clouds of steam.

The vicar took the basin, sat down, stirred it, smelt it, tasted it, and replaced the spoon, while Mrs. Slee watched his face eagerly.

"Wants another pinch of salt and another dash of pepper. Fetch them Mrs. Slee, and some bread."

Mrs. Slee, looking as ungracious as ever, but with an eagerness which she could not conceal, hurried out to return with the required articles, when more salt was added and a dash of pepper. Then a slice of bread was cut from the home-made loaf, and the vicar tasted—tasted again, and then, in the calmest and most unperturbed manner possible, went on partaking of the soup, every mouthful being watched with intense eagerness by the woman waiting for his judgment.

"Capital soup this, Mrs. Slee; capital brew!"

Mrs. Slee did not smile, as the vicar diligently hunted the last grains of rice in the bottom of the basin with his spoon, but she gave a sigh of satisfaction.

"This will go off like a shot. How much have you got of it? Almost equal to our soup at Boanerges."

"There's about sixty quarts of it, sir."

"Sixty? Not half enough. You'll have to start the copper again directly, Mrs. Slee. Ah, by the way, Bailey will bring two hundred loaves this evening, and we'll give them away with the soup in the morning."

"Two hundred loaves!" exclaimed Mrs. Slee. "Bless the man, where am I to put them?"

"Oh, we'll stack them in the hall if we can't put them anywhere else, Mrs. Slee," said the vicar, laughing. "And let that soup cool. It'll be like jelly in the morning. I'm going to walk over to Bultitude's, and I'll call at the butcher's about the beef."

"But that broth would bear as much watter to it, and that would make twice as much."

"Now, Mrs. Slee, I won't have a good thing spoiled," said the vicar. "I don't believe you mind the trouble of making it."

"That I'm sure I don't," said Mrs. Slee, sharply; "only you're giving away cartloads of bread and meat,

and pailsful of soup to folks as wean't say thank you for it, and laugh at you for your pains."

"They won't laugh at me while they're eating that beautiful soup, Mrs. Slee, which does you credit. If they like to laugh afterwards—well, let them."

"Oh, I don't want no praise for the broth," said Mrs. Slee, ungraciously. "You telled me how to mak' it. But I don't like to see you robbing yourself for them as is sure to be ungrateful."

"We won't mind that, Mrs. Slee," said the vicar, smiling; "and now I'm going off to Bultitude's, and I'll see if I can't get there this time. By the way, Mrs. Slee, I should like a little tureen of that soup for my dinner; it's splendid. And look here, Mrs. Slee, if any one comes while I'm out, who needs a little, you can lend a jug, and give some of the soup before it's cold. I'll leave that to you."

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE VICAR'S SOUP.

"He's a strange good man," said Mrs. Slee, grimly, as she watched the vicar down the path; "and he must hev a vast o' money, giving away as he is raight and left. Well, I won't hev him cheated if I can help it, for the more he gives the more he may. Who's yon at the back?"

The last remark was jerked out as a soft tap was heard at the kitchen door, and on going to answer it, there stood Sim Slee.

"Well?"

"Well?"

"Didn't I tell thee as thou needn't come here?" said Mrs. Slee. "I thowt you wouldn't darken parson's door again."

"What's that as smells?" said Sim, giving a sniff.

"Soup for them as you and your strike folk have left to pine to dead," snapped Mrs. Slee.

"Is that some on it in they pancheons?" said Sim.

"Yes, it is," said his wife, sulkily.

"I heerd tell on it," said Sim. "He've been a scrattin about at all the butchers', and buying up weighs of cag

mag as they couldn't sell. I saw a basket o' stinking bones come up to the gate, and I heerd at the Bull as he's gotten four beasts' heads promised. Yah! it's a shame as such as him should hev a place like this and five hundred a year."

"Thou fulsome!" exclaimed Mrs. Slee, angrily. "I wean't stand by and hear parson talked about like that."

"All raight," said Sim, sneering; "he's won you ower then. But what hev you gotten to eat?"

"Nowt," said Mrs. Slee, shortly.

"Here, just take thee scithers, and coot the dwiny ends off my collar," said Sim, holding up the ragged but scrupulously clean collar of the shirt he wore; and this duty was diligently performed by his wife.

"Some one telled me as the soup meat was covered wi' maddick bees," said Sim, as soon as the task was done.

"Then some one telled thee a lie," said Mrs. Slee, sharply.

"Power up a few of it in a basin," said Sim, after examining the broad earthen pans in which the soup steamed. "Let's see what sorter stuff the down-trodden serf is to be compelled to eat."

"It isn't good enough for such as thou," said Mrs. Slee, sharply.

Sim took up the spoon, and with an air of disgust raised some of the soup and let it drop back, exhaling as it did so a most tantalising odour for a hungry man.

"I just come by Riggall's, the bone-setter's," said Sim; "and he says as he won't hev parson meddling wi' his trade, if doctor does. Why, he tied up Binney Mawtrop's hand as he got in the wheel."

"Yes, and I held a basin and a sponge for him," said Mrs. Slee, eyeing her husband. "He owt to hev let him bleed to dead, of course."

"Say, owd lass," said Sim, "is this stuff fit to yeat?"

"Fit to yeat, thou unconditioned fulsome! it ain't fit for thee. Bread and watter's what such shacks as thou ought to hev, and nowt besides."

"Thy tongue's gotten a strange and rough edge to it this morning, moother," said Sim, grinning, and longing

to convey the spoon to his mouth, but feeling that it would not be consistent.

"There, sit thee down," said Mrs. Slee. "I know what you mean. There, sit down, and don't get theeing and thouing me about. A deal you care for me."

This was in answer to a rough caress, as she bustled about, and got a basinful of soup for her lord, with a great hunk of bread; and without more ado Sim took his seat.

"Oh, I'm not going to yeat this," he said. "I'm just going to taste what sorter mook he gives the pore out of his bounty."

"Howd thee tongue and eat," said Mrs. Slee, contemptuously.

Sim played with the spoon, and splashed the soup about, ending by tasting it and retasting, and then taking some bread and going heartily to work.

"Say, moother," he exclaimed, "it won't do; that's the broth you've been makking for the parson hissen. It ain't to give away."

"That's made o' the meat as the parson went and scratted up from the butcher's, and the baskets o' bones and beasts' heads, and all the rubbish he could get together," said Mrs. Slee, sourly.

"I'll say it's good soup," said Sim, finishing his basin. "Say, moother, give's another soop."

"He said I was to give some to anybody who wanted," said Mrs. Slee; and then, with a grim smile, she refilled his basin, while Sim drew out his handkerchief, spread it on his knees, and polished off the second basin in a very few minutes.

"You can't get me to believe as that soup's going to be gin away," he said as he rose. "That'll be wattered till it's thin as thin. Theer, I'm off again. I've a deal to see to;" and without another word he hurried away.

"Yes, he's gotten his fill," said Mrs. Slee, directing a look of contempt after her husband; but as she crossed the kitchen she saw something white under the chair Sim had occupied, and stooping down picked up a note in a very small envelope, whose address she spelled out:

"Miss Banks,

By hand."

"What's he gotten to do wi' takin' letters to Daisy Banks?" she exclaimed, as a hot feeling of jealousy came upon her for a moment. Then, with a half-laugh, she said, "No, no, it ain't that: he's too old and unheppen, and she's ower young and pretty. He's takkin it for some one. Who's writing will it be? He's coming back."

She stopped short, hearing a step, and darted out of the kitchen just as Sim came softly up, peered in and looked eagerly about the floor and under the table.

"Mebbe I've dropped it somewheers else," he muttered, starting off again, while Mrs. Slee had another good look at the letter, and ended by depositing it in her bosom.

"I'll give it to parson," she said at last, and then resumed her work.

Meanwhile, Murray Selwood was retracing his steps on the way to Bultitude's farm, but before he reached the place he came upon John Maine once more, looking eagerly across the fields.

"Well, Maine, how's the head?" said the vicar, making the young man start, for the grass had deadened his tread. "What can you see—game?"

"I'm afraid it is, sir," said the young man, bluntly—"the sportsman and the hare."

"H'm!" ejaculated the vicar, as he caught sight of two figures on the hill-side, far distant; but the day was so beautifully clear that he could make out Richard Glaire and a companion. "Mr. Glaire and his cousin," he said, hastily.

"No, sir," said the young man, quietly, "that's what it ought to be. It's Mr. Richard Glaire and one of the town girls. I think it's Daisy Banks. Do you know him well, sir?"

"Yes, pretty well," said the vicar, eyeing the young man's saddened face intently.

"Well, sir, it's no business of mine," said the young fellow; "but if I was a friend of Mr. Richard Glaire, I should tell him to keep at home, and not do that; for the men are getting hot again him, and he may fall into trouble."

"John Maine if any violence is intended against Mr.

Glaire," said the vicar, "I wish you to tell me at once."

"I don't know of any, sir," said Maine, "only Tom Podmore's dreadfully put out about Daisy Banks, and the strike people are growing more bitter every day. If I do hear of anything, sir, I'll tell you."

They came directly upon old Bultitude, looking bluff and ruddy in his velveteens and gaiters.

"Ah, parson, fine day! how are you? What's the matter?"

"Well, Maine here isn't well," said the vicar.

"What's wrong, lad? Why, thou said'st nowt when you came in a bit ago."

"Oh, it's nothing, sir, nothing," said John Maine, hastily.

"Let him go and lie down for an hour," said the vicar, looking at the young man's ghastly face.

"Not got fever, hev you, my lad?" said the old gentleman, kindly, as they walked up to the house. "Here, Jess, pull down the blinds in the far room, and let John Maine come and lie down a bit theer."

At his summons, Jessie's young and pleasant face appeared at the window. It had no more pretensions to beauty than a pair of soft, dark eyes, and a bright, rosy colour, and the eyes looked very wistfully at John Maine, who now made an effort.

"No, no, sir," he said. "I won't lie down. I'll get to work again. There's nothing like forgetting pain."

"Well, perhaps you're right, Maine," said the vicar. "Well, Mr. Bultitude, we don't get over our strike."

"Parson, it makes me wild," said the old man. "I can't bear it, and I shall be glad—strange and glad to see it over; for I hate to see a pack of men standing about the town doing o' nowt. Can't you do owt wi' the works people?"

The vicar shook his head.

"I've tried both ways—hard," he said; "master and men, but no good comes of it."

While this conversation was going on, Jessie had stepped anxiously forward, and laid her hand upon John Maine's arm.

"Is anything serious the matter, John?" she said, anxiously. "Are you very ill?"

He started when she touched him as if he had been stung, and withdrew his arm hastily; and then, without so much as a glance at the girl's earnest, appealing eyes, he turned away and followed the vicar down the path, for he had shaken hands and parted from the farmer.

"I'll see you across the home close, sir," said John Maine.

"Thank you, do," said the vicar; "but I think your bull pretty well knows me now. Hallo! here comes Mr. Brough, the Squire's keeper, with his black looks and black whiskers. He always looks at me as if he thought I had designs on the Squire's game. Hallo! Maine, bad friends? What does that mean?" he continued, as the man gave him a surly salute and then passed on, gun over shoulder, bestowing upon the young bailiff a sneering, half-savage look that was full of meaning.

"Tom Brough has never been very good friends with me, sir, since I thrashed him for annoying Miss Jessie there, up at the farm."

"Seems as if his love has not yet returned," said the vicar, as he strode away, thinking of the various little plots and by-plots going on in his neighbourhood; and then sighing deeply as he felt that there was trouble in store for himself, in spite of his stern discipline and busy efforts to keep his mind too much employed to think of the countenance that haunted his dreams.

It seemed to be the vicar's fate to appear as playing the spy upon Richard Glaire, for, on his return, taking a round-about way back, so as to make a call upon one or two people whom he had relieved of some part of the suffering induced by the strike, he was once more striking for the High Street, when he heard the words sharply uttered:

"Well, I'll pay you this time; but let me find that you fail me again and don't you expect——Confound——!"

"How do, Mr. Glaire," said the vicar, for he had come suddenly upon Richard, laying down the law pretty sharply to Sim Slee, and he was close to them before it was seen on either side.

"Really," said the vicar to himself as he strode on, "I've not the slightest wish to see what that unfortunate young man does; but it seems to me that I am to be bound to bear witness to a great deal. Heigho! these are matters that must be left to time."

He entered his own gate soon after, and having received Mrs. Slee's report, that lady handed him the note she had found.

"Mr. Glaire's hand," he said, involuntarily and with his brows knit. "Where did you get this?"

"My master came to see me, and he must ha' dropped it," said Mrs. Slee.

"Then take it to him," said the vicar, quietly, as he resumed his calm aspect. "It is nothing to do with us."

"I don't know about that," said Mrs. Slee, sharply. "What call has young master Dick Glaire to be writing letters to she?"

"Take the letter to your husband, Mrs. Slee," said the vicar, quietly; and then left alone, he threw himself into his chair, and covered his face with his hands, trying hard to resist temptation, for he knew well enough that if he had kept that letter and dishonourably shown it to Eve Pelly, so serious a breach would be created that his future success would be almost certain. But, no; he could not stir a step to make her unhappy. She loved this man, who was quite unworthy of her; and if she ever was awakened from her dream his must not be the hand that roused her.

He started as he heard the door close loudly, and saw Mrs. Slee go down the path to seek out her husband, and return the letter.

There was time now to call her back, but he did not move, only sat and watched her bear away that which he knew might have been used as the lever to overthrow Richard Glaire.

Once only did he hesitate, but it was when his thoughts reverted to Daisy Banks and the possibility of ill befalling her, through her intimacy with Richard Glaire.

"But I cannot take action on a letter that falls accidentally into my hands," he said. "If I speak to the

girl's father it must be on the subject of what I have seen; and that I will do."

He gave the matter a little consideration, and then determined to act at the risk of being considered a meddler, and walked straight to Joe Banks's pleasant little home, where he found Mrs. Banks and Daisy alone the girl being in tears.

He was turning back, so as to avoid being present during any family trouble, when Mrs. Banks arrested him.

"Don't you go away, sir, please, for I should like you to have your word with this girl as well as me. It's no use to speak to her father and——Hoity-toity, miss."

Poor Daisy did not stop to hear the rest; for already growing thin with worry and mental care connected with her love affair, Mrs. Banks was leading her rather a sad life in her husband's absence, ostensibly to benefit Tom Podmore, but really hardening the girl's heart against him, if she had felt any disposition to yield: she now started up to hide her tears, and ran out of the room.

"Well, that's fine manners, miss!" exclaimed Mrs. Banks, apostrophising the absent one. "I'm always telling her and Joe, my husband, sir, that no good can come of her listening to young Master Dick Glaire."

"Then you don't approve of it, Mrs. Banks?" said the vicar, quietly.

"Approve of it, sir? No, nor anybody else, except her foolish father, who's the best and kindest man in the world: only when he takes an obstinate craze there's no turning him."

The vicar found the matter already to his hand, and was spared the trouble of introducing the subject; but he would rather have found Joe Banks present.

"Does he approve of it?" he said, quietly.

"Approve of it, sir! yes. I tell him, and all his neighbours tell him, that it's a bit of foolish vanity; but they can't turn him a morsel."

"Hallo, moother," said Joe Banks, entering the room, "can't you let that rest?"

"No, Joe, and I never shall," exclaimed Mrs. Banks.

"Don't you tak' any notice, sir," said Joe. "She heven't talked yeu round, hev she?"

"No, Mr. Banks," said the vicar, quietly; "it was not necessary. I have no right to interfere in these matters, but——"

"Well, speak out, sir, speak out," said Joe, rather sternly. "Say out like a man what you mean."

"If I did, Mr. Banks, I should say that you were imprudent to let this matter proceed."

"Why?"

"Because it is a well-known fact that Mr. Glaire is engaged to his cousin."

"There, Joe; there, Joe; what did I tell thee?" cried Mrs. Banks, triumphantly; while Daisy, who could hear nearly all that was said, crouched with burning face in her room, shivering with nervous excitement, though longing to hear more.

"All raight, parson, I know," said Joe; "I see. The missus has sent you."

"Indeed, no, Banks," said the vicar. "I speak as a friend, without a word from anybody."

"Then, what do you mean by it?" cried Joe, exploding with passion. "What raight have you to come interferin' in a man's house, and about his wife and daughter? This is my own bit o' freehold, Mr. Selwood, and if you can't pay respect to me and to mine, and see that if Master Richard Glaire, my old fellow-workman's boy, chooses to marry my gal, he's a raight to, why I'd thank you to stay away."

"Don't be angry with me, Mr. Banks," said the vicar, laying his hand upon the other's arm; "I indeed wish you and yours well."

"Then keep to wishing," said Joe, sharply. "I'm not an owd fool yet. Think I don't know? Here's the Missus, and Missus Glaire, and Tom Podmore, all been at you; and 'All raight, leave it to me,' says you. 'I'll put it all raight.' And now you've had your try, and you can't put it raight. I'll marry my gal to anybody I like and she likes, in spite of all the parsons in Lincolnshire."

"Don't you tak' any notice of what he says, sir, please," cried Mrs. Banks. "He's put out, and when he is, and it's about something that he knows he's wrong over——"

"No, he isn't," roared Joe.

"He says anything, sir," continued Mrs. Banks.

"No, he don't," roared Joe. "He's a saying raight, and what he says is, that he won't be interfered wi' by any one. He's got trouble enew ower the strike, and he won't hev trouble ower this; so perhaps Mr. Selwood 'll stop away from my place till he's asked to come again."

"Joe, you ought to be ashamed of yoursen," cried Mrs. Banks. "He'll come and beg your pardon for this, sir, or I'll know the reason why."

"No, he wean't," roared Joe. "So now go; and if you hadn't been such a straightforward chap ower the row again Master Richard, I'd hev said twice as much to you."

"Yes, I'll go," said the vicar, quietly. "Good day, Mrs. Banks. Good day, Banks; you'll find I'm less disposed to meddle than you think, and give me credit for this some day. Come, you'll shake hands."

"Dal me if I will," cried Joe.

"Nonsense, man; shake hands."

"I wean't," roared Joe, stuffing his hands in his pockets, and turning his back.

"Well, Mrs. Banks, you will," said the vicar; and then as he went away, he said:

"Mrs. Banks, and you, Mr. Banks, please recollect this: I shall forget all these words before I get home; so don't either of you think that we are bad friends, because we are not; and you, Mr. Banks, you are of too sterling stuff not to feel sorry for what you have said."

"There, it wean't do," roared Joe; "I wean't be talked ower;" but the vicar hardly heard his words, for he was striding thoughtfully away.

CHAPTER XXIV.

BY THE CHALK PIT.

Though Sim Slee had omitted on two occasions to convey letters to Daisy Banks making appointments for meetings in different parts of the country walks round Dumford, Daisy had had a pretty good supply of messages; and feeling as it were compelled to obey, she had

gone on more than one occasion with sinking heart, to return with aching eyes, whose lids looked swollen and red with weeping.

For the girl was simply wretched, and time after time she looked back to the days when her heart was whole, and as she threw herself wearily on her bed she sobbed herself again and again to sleep, wishing that her very life were ended; the deceit she was obliged to practise, the anger of her mother, and the open sneers and innuendos of neighbours wounding her so that the smart was almost more than she could bear.

Whether Dick chose east, west, north, or south for the appointment, poor Daisy could never get out of the town without encountering some one to give her a peculiar look, more than once driving the poor girl to make pretence of calling at some place that she did not want to visit, and as often turning her back home, making Richard Glaire, who had been kept waiting and "fooled," as he called it, write her the cruellest and most angry letters, some even of a threatening nature.

It happened one evening that poor Daisy, who had broken faith the night before, was going slowly up the High Street, with a basket on her arm, as if bound on some marketing expedition, when it seemed as if it was impossible that she could get to her trysting-place, where she knew that Dick must have been waiting for an hour.

First the landlord of the Bull was standing at his door smoking, and he gave a sneering nod, which seemed to say, "I know where you are going, my lass."

A little further on sat Miss Purley, at her window, ready to put up her great square, chased gold eye-glass, and stare at the blushing girl with all the indignant force of thirty-nine tinged yellow, against nineteen of the freshest pink.

Again a little further, and she came suddenly upon Eve Pelly, who came from the big house, started, stopped, caught her hands, ejaculating "Oh, Daisy!" and then breaking down, turned suddenly away and re-entered the house.

To her horror, poor Daisy found that this meeting had been witnessed by Miss Primgeon, the lawyer's sister,

who was seated at her window, staring as hard as she could.

Not twenty yards farther on there stood Tom Podmore, leaning against a corner of a lane, also watching her, but as she approached he turned away without a word.

It was almost unbearable, and now a feeling of anger began to rise in Daisy's bosom, making her pant, and flush up, as she determined to go on at all hazards.

Jane Budger, who kept the little beer-house, and knew all the gossip of the place, which she retailed with gills of ale to her customers, saw her, stared, or rather squinted at her, and moved her hands as she exclaimed :

"Yes, my dear, I know where you are agate for to-night."

Then there seemed a peculiar meaning in the innocent remark of one neighbour who met her in the street, and observed that the stones were "strange and slape." So it was with another a little higher up, who remarked that the road was "very clatty."

Next she met Big Harry in the muddiest part of the main street, and he exclaimed to her :

"Saay, lass, it's solid soft."

A little farther on she passed the druggist's, where the great bottle of the trophies of his dental work seemed to grin at her in a ghastly way, for it was three parts full of extracted teeth.

Again a little further, and as she was passing Riggal's, the bone-setter's, his ghastly sign over his front door, of a skull and cross-bones, made her shudder ; for it seemed to tell her of the goal to which she was steering, and so affected her, that outside the town in the winding road, she sat down shivering upon the mile-stone, crying as though her heart would break.

"What shall I do! What shall I do!" she sobbed, when she started up with a faint shriek, for a light hand was laid upon her shoulder.

"Miss Eve!" she cried, on seeing the pale tearless girl before her.

"Yes, Daisy, it is I," said Eve. "I want to speak to you. Let us walk on together."

"No, no, Miss Eve. No, no, dear ; not that way.

"Is Dick waiting for you up there?" said Eve, huskily.

"Don't ask me, Miss; don't ask me, please," cried Daisy, imploringly, as they walked down a side lane.

"I thought he was," said Eve, speaking in a very low deep voice, as if her emotion was stifling her. "I followed you to speak to you."

"You've been following and watching me," cried Daisy, with a burst of passion. "You all do; everybody watches me. What have I done that I should be so cruelly used? I wonder some one don't want to put me in prison."

"Daisy!" cried Eve, hoarsely, as she caught her by the wrist, "what have I done to you that you should have been so cruel and treacherous?"

"I haven't been," cried Daisy, with a burst of pettish sobs.

"Have I not always been kind and affectionate to you?"

"Yes, yes; I know that," cried Daisy.

"And you reward me by trying to rob me of my promised husband."

"I didn't, I didn't," sobbed Daisy. "I didn't want to; but he was always following me, and hunting me, and worrying me."

"Daisy, Daisy!" cried Eve, with a passionate cry, as she threw herself on her knees to the homely girl, "give him back to me; oh, give him back."

"Miss Eve! Miss Eve!" cried the girl, startled at the vehemence and suddenness of this outburst, "oh, do please get up. What can I do?"

"Oh, Daisy, you'll break my heart. You'll kill poor aunt. What have we done, that you should come like a blight upon us?"

Eve rose slowly and stood facing the girl, over whom a change seemed to be coming as she said, sulkily:

"It wasn't my doing."

"But you must have led him on," moaned poor Eve. "You, who are so bright and pretty, while I—while I—"

Daisy gave her now a jealous, vindictive look, as if she

felt danger; and that this gentle girl was about to rob her of the man she loved, and she exclaimed:

"I must go. I won't stop to be scolded. You want to win him back; but he belongs to me."

"Daisy, Daisy!" cried Eve, catching at her shawl; but it was too late—the girl had turned and run back into the road, hastening on to the place where she was to have found Richard Glaire, up by the chalk pit; and as she hastened on, she would not look back. Still poor Eve followed her sadly as far as the road, and then turned back towards the town, saying sadly:—

"I could not move her. It is too late, too late."

Long before Eve Pelly had reached the town, with its knots of men out of work, Daisy had climbed the hill to the chalk pit, where Richard was waiting, smoking angrily.

"At last!" he cried. "I was just going back."

He gave a glance round, and was about to throw his arms round the flushed and panting girl, when he started back, and stood staring, as Mrs. Glaire came slowly forward from amongst the trees, and taking Daisy's wrist in her hand, she pointed down the road.

"There, you can go back," she said, quietly. "I wish to speak to Daisy Banks."

"No, no, Richard—Dick, dear, don't leave me with her; she'll kill me!" screamed Daisy, frightened by the pale, resolute-looking little woman, who held her so tightly.

"Silence, child!" cried Mrs. Glaire.

"Oh, come, let's have an end of this," cried Richard.

"I intend to try for an end," said Mrs. Glaire, sharply, "for with you I can make no compact that will not be broken."

"Oh, if it's coming to that," said Richard, sharply, "I shall bring matters to an end."

"Go, sir! Go home," said Mrs. Glaire, sternly.

"Come, you needn't bully that poor girl," said Dick, with a half laugh; then seeing the hand still pointing down the road, he grew uneasy, fidgeted, and ended by saying, "There, just as you like."

"Dick, don't leave me," gasped Daisy.

"Don't you be a little silly," laughed Richard. "She won't hurt you. I say, mother, you'd better make matters up with Daisy and bring her home, for I think I shall marry her after all."

"Don't, don't leave me, Dick," whispered Daisy, straining to reach him; but her wrist was tightly clasped, and she sank shivering on the bank by the deep chalk pit, whose side was separated from the lane by a low post and rail fence, beyond which the descent was a sheer precipice of seventy or eighty feet, the old weakened side being dotted with flowers; a place which, as she stood holding Daisy's wrist still tightly and watching her son till he disappeared down the road, Mrs. Glaire remembered to have been a favoured spot in her girlhood for gathering nosegays; and where, more than once, she had met her dead husband in the happy days of her own courtship.

As these thoughts came back from the past, a feeling of pity for the poor girl beside her stole into Mrs. Glaire's heart, and she trembled in her purpose; but after a few moments' indecision, she told herself that it was for the happiness of all, and that Daisy Banks must suffer in place of Eve.

The stars were beginning to peer out faintly and the glow in the west was paling; but still she stood holding the wrist tightly; while, after making a few energetic efforts to free herself, Daisy submitted like a trapped bird, and crouched there palpitating, and not daring once to raise her eyes to those of the angry mother of the man she believed she loved; but who had at all events obtained so strong a hold upon her that she was forced to submit her will to his, and obey his every command.

CHAPTER XXV.

AT HOME.

"Two can play at that game," said Richard to himself, as he walked sharply down the hill and back into the town, where, not heeding Eve, who was in the dining-room, he hastily wrote a short letter, and then putting on his hat, went out again, smoking a cigar, apparently to have a stroll, and sauntered down towards the Bull and Cucum-

ber, where he gave a long, low whistle, uttered twice, and then walked on for some distance.

His signal had the required effect, for Sim Slee came after him with a soft pace like a cat, and together the two men went on in the darkness, Richard talking earnestly to his companion, and passing money to him, whose chink was very audible.

"Now you quite understand?" said Richard, earnestly.

"Understand? He, he, he!" chuckled Sim. "I've got it quite by heart. I say, won't Joe Banks be popped?"

"Hold your tongue, and keep names quiet. Now you quite understand. I shall not show my face in the matter at all."

"Oh, no, of course not," said Sim. "All right, Mr. Glaire, sir. You couldn't have a troostier man than me."

"I don't know," said Richard; "perhaps I oughtn't to have given you the money till after."

"Oh, you may troost me, Mr. Richard, I'm square, sir, and honourable. It'll all be done lovely."

"Then I shall not see you again," said Richard; and they parted.

"Ho, ho, ho!" chuckled Sim, slapping his legs. "Here's a game. Some on 'em 'll be chattering all over the place 'bout this, and, ho, my!"

He had another long enjoyable laugh, to start up half frightened, for a dark figure approached him so suddenly, that it was close upon him before he was aware of the fact.

"What are you laughing at?" said the new-comer, sharply. "What devil's game hev yow and that Dick Glaire been hatching?"

"Hatching? Devil's game, Tom Podmore? why, can't a man laugh in the lane if he likes? But there, I'm off up to the mill, for it'll reean to-night, mun."

Tom Podmore strode off after Richard Glaire, muttering angrily, and on getting close to the town, it was to see the young man walking right in the middle of the road, to avoid the men standing about on the pebble-paved side-walks.

It was well he did so, for there were plenty of hands ready to be raised against him, and had one struck at

him, it would have been the signal for a rain of blows: for scores of men in the place were now vowing vengeance against the man whom they accused of starving their wives and bairns. In fact, it had so far been Richard Glaire's insolent temerity that had saved him from assault. He had gone boldly about, urged thereto by his eagerness to meet little Daisy Banks, but for which engagements he would probably have stayed indoors, and run greater risks on the few occasions when he showed himself.

As it was, he hastened his steps this night, on seeing the dark groups about, and when Tom Podmore closed up, he almost ran the last few steps, dashed open the door, and, closing it, stood panting in the hall.

It was about half-past ten now, and he listened, with his hand upon the bolt, to the muttering voices without for a few minutes, till one of the maids came in to gaze at at him curiously.

"Here, fasten up this door," he said, harshly.

"Fasten the door, sir?" said the girl.

"Yes, fasten the door, stupid," he cried, angrily.

"But missus hasn't come in yet," said the girl.

"Not come in?" said Richard, starting as he recalled where he had left her; and then, with a hasty pish! "I daresay she's at Purley's. I'll fasten the door. Don't sit up."

The girl was leaving the hall, when he called after her:—

"Where's Miss Eve?"

"Gone to bed, sir, with a sick headache."

"She's always got a sick headache," growled Richard.

"I wish you had 'em your sen," muttered the girl.

"There, bring some hot water and a tumbler into the dining-room," said Richard, as the girl was turning to go.

He went into the dining-room, got out the spirit-stand, and, on the hot water being brought, mixed himself a stiff glass of brandy and water, and drank it rapidly, listening occasionally to the footsteps and loud talking without.

A second glass followed shortly after, and then, tired out with the day's work, the young man threw himself on the sofa. The sounds outside by degrees grew indistinct and distant, and then, with a pale, ghost-like Eve follow-

ing him always, he was journeying through foreign lands with Daisy, who looked lovingly up in his face. Then, Tom Podmore seemed to be pursuing him and threatening his life. Next it was the vicar; and then, at last, after struggling hard to get away, Joe Banks stood over him with a flashing light, and as he waited to hear him say, "Where is my child?"—waited with a feeling of suspense that seemed prolonged for years, the voice said coldly and sternly:

"Why are you not in bed?"

He started into wakefulness to see that it was his mother standing over him with a chamber candlestick, looking very cold and white.

"How could I go to bed when you were not back?" he said, sulkily.

"You can go to bed now," she said, quietly.

"Where have you been?"

She made no answer.

"Were there many of those scoundrels about?" he asked.

"The men would not injure me," she said, in the same low voice.

"But how did you get in?"

"Eve came down and admitted me," was the reply.

"What's o'clock?"

Mrs. Glaire made no answer.

"Oh, if you like to be sulky you can," said Richard, coolly; and, lighting a chamber candle, he strode off to bed.

As he turned to wind up his watch in a sleepy manner, he found that it had run down, so with an impatient gesture he laid it aside, finished undressing, and tumbled into bed.

"Some of them will open their eyes to-morrow," he muttered, with a half laugh. "Well, it was time to act. I'm not going to be under petticoat government all my life."

At the same time Mrs. Glaire was seated pale and shivering in the dining-room, while all else in the house were sleeping soundly, and the street was now painfully still, for the murmuring workers of the foundry had long since

sought their homes, more than one sending up a curse on Richard Glaire, instead of a prayer for his well-being and peace.

CHAPTER XXVI.

OLD FRIENDS AGAIN.

"If I could only tell him everything," muttered John Maine as he strode away from the vicar's side, and made for the farm.

He was not half way back, when he met Tom Brough, the keeper, who favoured him with a sneering, contemptuous kind of smile that made the young man's blood boil. He knew him to be a rival, though he felt sure that Jessie did not favour his suit in the slightest degree. Still her uncle seemed to look upon Brough as a likely man to make his niece a good partner; for Tom Brough expected to come in for a fair amount of property, an old relative having him down in his will for succession to a comfortable farm—a nice thing, argued old Bultitude, for a young couple beginning life.

It might have been only fancy, but on reaching the crew-yard, old Bultitude seemed to John Maine to speak roughly to him. However, he took no notice, but went about his duties, worked very hard for a time, and went in at last to the evening meal, to find Jessie looking careworn and anxious.

After tea he sent a boy up with a message to the cricket field, saying that he was too unwell to come; and after this he went to his own room to sit and think about his future, breaking off the thread of his musings and seeking Jessie, whom he found alone, and looking strange and distant.

"Jessie," he began, and she turned her face towards him, but without speaking, and then there was a minute's pause.

"Jessie," he began again, and the intention had been to speak of his own affairs, but his feelings were too much for him, and he turned off the primary question to pass to one that had but a secondary place in his mind.

Jessie did not reply, but looked up at him timidly, in

a way that checked rather than accelerated his flow of words.

"I wanted to speak to you about Daisy Banks," he said at last.

"Yes; what about her?" said Jessie, wonderingly.

"I ought not to speak perhaps; but you have no mother, and Mr. Bultitude does not seem to notice these things."

"I don't know what you mean," said Jessie, wonderingly.

John Maine would gladly have backed out of his position, but it was too late, and he was obliged to flounder on.

"I meant about Daisy Banks and Mr. Richard Glaire."

"Well?" said Jessie, looking full at him. "What about them?"

"I meant that I don't think you ought to be so intimate with her now."

"And why not?"

"The Dumford people couple her name very unpleasantly with Mr. Richard's, and for your sake I thought I'd speak."

"For shame!" cried the girl, rising, and looking angrily at him. "That young Podmore has been talking to you."

"No, indeed, indeed, poor Tom never mentions her name."

"I won't believe, John Maine, that you could be so petty and ungenerous yourself. Mr. Glaire loves Daisy, and she confided all to me. Such words as yours are quite an insult to her, and—and I cannot—will not stay to hear them."

The girl's face was burning, and she ran out of the place to hide her tears, while John Maine, whose intention had been to say something very different, sighed bitterly, and went back to his room. There, however, everything looked blacker than ever, and he could see nothing in the gloom—devise no plan. He knew that the best proceeding would be to set the scoundrels he had seen that morning at defiance—that everybody whose opinion was worth a rush would applaud his frank declaration that he

had turned from his evil courses to those which were reputable; but then the people he knew—Mr. Bultitude—Jessie—the vicar—his friends in Dumford—what would they say? There seemed to be but one chance for him—to pack up a few things in a bundle and go and seek his fortune again elsewhere—perhaps to live in peace for a few years before he should be again hunted down by some of the wolves amongst whom his early lot had been cast.

"John—John!"

He started. It was Jessie calling, and hastily going down-stairs, it was to see her with the flush gone out of her cheeks, and looking pale and anxious, as she held out a strip of paper.

"Two rough-looking men gave this to the boy for you," she said, looking at him in a troubled way.

He took the paper hastily, and turned away with a dark red glow spreading over his temples. He divined who had sent the note, and shivered as he thought of how the boy would chatter to everybody about the farm. Perhaps Jessie had questioned him already, and set him down as being the friend and companion of the senders.

Turning away, he walked out into the yard to find that the paper had originally been used for holding an ounce of tobacco, and upon it was scrawled in pencil:

"We ave bin spekkin yu hat the krikt fele Ude betr cum. "2 OLE FRENDS."

"You had better come!" What should he do? Set them at defiance or go away at once?

Torn by doubts, he could do neither, but stood hesitating, till, in a fit of desperation, he strode off in the direction of the cricket-field.

He had saved a little money, and he might perhaps bribe them to take it and go, leaving him in peace, though he felt the while that such a proceeding would only be an invitation to them to come back, and demand more; but even if they did, a fortnight's respite was worth all he possessed; and, besides, it would give him time to turn round and devise some plan for freeing himself of his incubus.

To reach the cricket-field he had to pass the back-door of the vicarage; taking, as he did, the cut through the fields; and as he neared it, separated from it by a high hedge, his blood turned cold as he heard Mrs. Slee's shrill voice exclaim:

"You can't miss it: the second turning to the right, and then it's the second field."

"And you wean't buy the bud then, mum—that theer goldfinch as I told you off?"

"Bird, no," cried Mrs. Slee; "what do I want with such clat. Let the poor thing go. You ought to be ashamed of yoursens."

"We just about are," said one of the men: and then, as John Maine remained breathless behind the hedge, he heard the grating of feet upon the gravel, and one said to the other:

"Say, Jem, lad, did you see?" and he made a smacking noise with his lips.

"I see," replied Jem, "everythink." Then, "If that theer Johnny Maine don't show up, we'll precious soon have the owd badger out of his earth."

John Maine shrank back with a cloud of thoughts hurrying through his brain, foremost among which was that these men had been spying up at the vicarage. Through any window there could be seen the valuable plate on the sideboard and shelves, and the plan of offering a bird for sale was but an excuse for getting up to a house—a plan which he knew of old.

For a few moments he felt disposed to turn back; then he was for facing them boldly: but all doubts were set at rest by footsteps coming in his direction; so, stepping out boldly, he was soon after face to face with his two old companions, who seemed to be strolling about with their hands in their pockets, enjoying an evening pipe.

"Here he is!" exclaimed Ike, grinning; "I knew he'd come. But howd your noise, Jem; don't make a row. Johnny don't care about being seen too much along with us. It's all raight. He knows a thing or two. There'll be a bit of a game on soon, lad, and we shall want you. We don't know one another, we don't. Now, which is the gainest way to the cricket-field?"

John Maine pointed in the direction, and Jem came close up with a leer, saying :

"Say, lad, recklect that plate job, eh? Melted down at Birmingham or Sheffle, an' no questions asked."

John Maine shuddered as he recalled the time when he was innocently made the bearer of a heavy package to a bullion melter, and told afterwards whence the silver had been obtained.

Before he had recovered himself, the two scoundrels had sauntered away, leaving him shivering, as he thought over their words, and understood them as a threat of denunciation, unless he kept his own council.

Then, in imagination, he saw a party drive over from one of the big towns in a light spring-cart, drawn by a weedy screw of a horse; an entry made at the vicarage, and everything of value swept away, while he was helpless to arrest the robbery, except at the cost of his worldly position.

He stood thinking for a time, and then strode on across the fields to the cricket ground, where a little half-hearted play was going on, the men of Dumford being too much influenced by the strike to care much for anything save their tobacco. He caught sight of the two men once or twice; but they took not the slightest heed of his presence, and instead of their watching him he watched them, following them at last into the town, and seeing them go along the main street past the Glaires' house, and away up the hill, Richard coming down and passing them.

"Can they be going right away?" thought John Maine, hopefully, till he recollected a low, poacher-haunted public-house about a mile beyond the chalk pit, and rightly set that down as their destination.

He turned back with a sigh, to see Tom Podmore leaning thoughtfully against one of the houses, and going up, the two young men engaged in conversation for a few minutes, each rigorously abstaining from all mention of the other's love affairs, and soon after they parted, for John Maine to seek his sleepless pillow.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LOST.

THERE was no newspaper in Dumford, only those which came from Ramford and Lindum, but news flew quite fast enough without, and by breakfast-time on the morning of the day following the events spoken of in the past chapter, it was known that Daisy Banks had not been home all night.

Joe Banks himself spread the news by going and making inquiries in all directions directly he was up.

For, on waking about half-past five, according to his regular custom, and jumping out of bed to dress and go into his garden, as he had no work, he found to his astonishment that his wife had not been to bed; and she now came to him, crying bitterly, to say that she had been sitting up all night waiting for Daisy.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he roared.

"I wanted to screen her, Joe," moaned Mrs. Banks. "I thought you'd be so popped with the poor girl; and though I didn't like her goings on, I didn't want her to be scolded."

"What time did she go out?" said Joe, trying to recall the past night.

"About eight, and I expected her back every minute after ten."

"Here, give me my hat," cried Joe; and he was off to the main street, where, in answer to inquiries, he found that Daisy had been seen in the High Street soon after eight.

"What's wrong?" said Tom Podmore, coming out of his house.

"Daisy! hev you seen my Daisy?" said Joe, furiously.

"Yes, I see her go up the street last night at about eight," said Tom, "as if going up the hill by the chalk pit."

"Did you folly her?"

"No," said Tom, sadly; "I never folly her now. But what's it mean—isn't she at home?"

"No," said Joe, sharply. "She's not been at home all night. Wheer can she be?"

"Better ask Master Dick Glaire," said Tom, uttering a groan. "He can tell ye."

"Howd thee tongue, thee silly fool," cried Joe, angrily. "How should he know owt about where she is? Here, come along. I'll soon show thee thou'rt wrong."

He led the way to the Big House, where one of the maids was just opening the shutters; and, on being beckoned to, she came to the door.

"Where's Master Richard?" said Joe.

"Fast asleep in bed," said the girl.

"Art sure?" said Joe.

"Yes, certain," said the girl.

"Was he out last night?"

"Yes," said the girl; "but he came home early, and then went out for a bit; but he was in very soon, and sat up to let missus in, while I went to bed."

"What time will he be up?" said Joe.

"Not before nine," said the girl. "Shall I tell him you want him?"

"No," said Joe. "I'll come on again soon."

Tom seemed surprised and troubled, for he had fully expected to find that Richard Glaire was from home.

"Thou'rt wrong, lad," said Joe, drawing his breath through his teeth. "Some ill has fallen to the poor lass."

"What's up, Joe Banks?" said Harry, the big hammerman, straddling slowly up.

"Did'st see owt o' my Daisy last night?" said Joe.

Harry pulled off his cap, and gave his head a rub before answering.

"Yes, I see her go up ta hill, 'bout eight it weer."

"Did you see her come back?" asked Tom, eagerly.

"No, lad, no. I see Master Richard Glaire come along though," said the big fellow, under the impression that that might act as a clue.

"Yes," said Tom, bitterly. "I saw him, and again at about ten, talking to Sim Slee, and then the lads followed him up street, and he ran into the house."

"Sim Slee," said Joe, thinking. "We'll ask him; but let's go to the police."

At the station no news could be heard, and as time went on, plenty of neighbours could be found to say that they had seen Daisy Banks go up the hill; and amongst these was the chattering old woman at the public house. But no one had seen her return.

"Come along o' me, lad," said Joe Banks; and they strode up the hill, a heavy sense of dread gathering over each of the men, as they thought of the chalk pit, and the possibility of Daisy having fallen in, to lie there dead or dying, on the rough, hard blocks at the bottom.

The morning was bright and beautiful, and the sun made the dew-sprinkled strands and twigs glitter like gems; but to those who sought Daisy Banks, all seemed gloomy, and in spite of all his bitter feelings, Tom Podmore's heart was terribly stirred within him, so that he uttered a wild cry when just at the top, and ran ahead to pick up something soaked and wet with the night dew.

"It's her basket," he cried.

Joe staggered and seemed to turn sick but recovering himself, he ran up to the younger man.

"Yes, it's her basket," he said, huskily. "Tom, lad, look over the rail—I—I can't."

Joe Banks sank down on his knees, and covered his face with his rough hands, while Tom shuddered, and then calling up his fortitude, looked over the rail down the steep-sided pit, and uttered a cry as he drew back, ran down the lane to the end of the slope, leaped the gate across the track where the carts descended, and running over the scattered lumps of chalk, made his way down into the deepest part of the pit, where to him it had seemed that Daisy was lying at the bottom of the wall of grey rock.

But, no, it was only her dew-soaked shawl; and though he looked in all directions, he found nothing else but a glove.

"She must have been here," he said to himself, and in an agitated way he clambered about over the blocks of chalk, and the *débris* fallen from above; but nothing was visible, and he stood at last looking around.

There was the face of the chalk before him, and he was

shut in by it right and left, the walls gradually falling lower as he turned back and passed the extinct lime-kiln, till they sloped down to the level of the track—the pit having been gradually dug in the side of the hill, every load taken out cutting farther into the side, and making the principal wall of chalk more precipitous and high.

Still, not satisfied, Tom Podmore ran back and hunted in all directions; but as far as he could see nothing was visible, and he turned once more to find the father coming to join him, trembling and looking ashy pale.

"Hev you found her, Tom? hev you found her?" he gasped, and on Tom shaking his head, he caught him by the arm. "Yes," he exclaimed, in a piteous voice, "that's her shawl. Where is she gone?"

"I heven't found her," said the young man, hoarsely. "She's not there."

"Not there? Not fallen in? Thank God, thank God! But are ye sure, lad? are ye sure?"

"I've hunted the place all over," said Tom, sadly; and then Joe Banks clutched his arm tightly, and they went straight back to the town, where Joe stopped at the Big House and was admitted, Tom Podmore following.

"Wheer's the master?" said Joe, hastily.

"Just come down and gone out," said the girl. "Shall I tell missus?"

"Yes," said Joe. "No;" and then to himself, "I can't meet her now."

He hurried out and down the street, head after head being thrust out, while the people outside their doors gave him looks of condolence, and shook their heads by way of sympathy.

"Tom, lad," said Joe, "I can't kinder understand this; it's amairzin. But look here, lad; go and ask the boys to come and help you, and mebbe you'll get a hundred of 'em ready to search for my bairn. Get the police, too. I'm off to find the young master."

Tom started off on his recruiting expedition, while Daisy's father hurried down the street to try and find Richard Glaire, though not with the most remote idea of coupling him with the girl's disappearance.

He had nearly reached the vicarage, and was passing

one of the side lanes, when he heard voices in altercation, and on glancing round it was to see the man he sought holding Sim Slee by the throat, and shaking him violently.

"You treacherous hound!" he was saying, "and after the way I've trusted you."

"Joe Banks, here, Joe Banks, help!" yelled Sim; but before Daisy's father could reach the couple Richard Glaire threw the democrat off, so that he staggered against the wall.

"You dog!" cried Richard, grinding his teeth.

"All right," whimpered Sim. "All right, Mr. Richard Glaire, Esquire. I've stood up for you enew lately; now tak' care of yoursen."

"I'll break your head, you scoundrel, if you don't go," roared Richard.

Sim rubbed the dust from his person and shook himself straight, looking sidewise the while at his assailant before sidling off, shaking his fist; and then, when about fifty yards away, turning round and shouting:

"I'll be even with you for this, Dick Glaire."

Richard made a rush at him, when Sim took to his heels and ran, while the young man turned back to where Joe Banks stood holding poor Daisy's basket and shawl.

"Master Dick," said the old man, sternly, "I want to ask thee a question, and I want yow, as your father's son, to give me a staightforward answer."

"But what does this all mean, Joe? what's this about Daisy?"

"Answer my question," said the old man, sternly; and then he paused for a moment, as he fixed his clear eyes on the young man's shifty face, before saying hoarsely:

"Were you out walking wi' my lass, Daisy, last night?"

"No," said Richard, firmly; "certainly not."

"And thee didn't see her last night at all?"

"Yes, oh, yes," said Richard, eagerly. "I did see her, and said, 'How d'ye do.'"

"Wheer?" said Joe Banks, without moving a muscle.

"Up by the chalk pit, at the top of the hill. I'd been having a round."

"What time?" said Joe, shortly.

"Well, let me see," said Richard, hesitating. "I came straight down home, and it was about half-past eight when I got in."

Joe stood thinking; the servant-girl had said that her master had come in early.

"And you didn't see my bairn after?" said Joe, gazing full in the young man's eyes.

"Certainly not," said Richard.

"Will you swear it?" said Joe.

Richard hesitated for a moment, and then, with a half laugh, said:

"Oh, yes, if you like."

"Perhaps I shall like, my lad; but I don't ask you to sweer now. You've heerd, I s'pose?"

"I've heard something, Joe, but can't quite make it out," said the young man.

"It's easy," said Joe, hoarsely. "My poor bairn came up town last night, and she hasn't been back. We found these here up by the chalk pit."

"But she hadn't fallen in?"

"No, my lad, no," said the old man, quietly, for he was thinking deeply. "But, thankye, thankye. They wanted to make me believe as you meant harm to the lass—all on 'em; but I knew you, lad, well, as your poor owd father's son."

"Mr. Banks!"

"Aw raight, my lad, aw raight. I never thowt it of you, never; but the tongues would wag, and I said if thee loved the bairn thee should'st hev her. You do her harm! Not you, lad; you cared too much for her. But harm's come to her some way. Let's find her."

"But how could they say such things of me?" said Richard, with virtuous indignation shining out of his eyes.

"Oh, they're a chithering lot," exclaimed Joe. "They'd seen thee talk to the bairn, or mebbe seen thee heving a walk.'wi' her, and that weer enew to set their tongues clacking. But we must be going, mun, for we're losing time; and if any one's done wrong by my bairn——"

Richard shrank away, startled at the lurid flash from the old man's eyes, as, setting his teeth, and clenching his massive fist, he shook it at vacancy, and then, without another word, strode on, accompanied by Richard, who was trembling now like a leaf.

"Let me go in here for a moment or two," said Richard, as they came abreast of the House; and as the door was thrown open, it was to show Mrs. Glaire and Eve both standing dressed in the hall.

"Oh, Mr. Banks," exclaimed the latter, running to the old foreman, "this is very dreadful;" and she caught one of his hands in hers.

"Thanky'e, dear bairn, thanky'e," he said, smiling upon her with quivering lip.

"But I saw her last night," cried Eve.

"Ay? What time, miss, what time?" said Joe, eagerly.

"About eight," said Eve, quickly. "She said, I think, that she was going to meet Richard."

"She said that?" said the old man, starting, while Richard turned pale.

"No, I remember," said Eve, piteously; "I told her she was going to meet him."

"Yes, yes," said Joe, thoughtfully. "You were jealous of the poor bairn."

Eve started back, blushing crimson.

"But are you sure she has not been home, Joe Banks?" said Mrs. Glaire, looking at him wistfully.

"Sure, ay, quite sure," said Joe, sternly. "Here is the poor bairn's shawl, and her basket too. I'll leave 'em here, if you'll let me."

He laid them down in the hall, and stepped out to where there was quite a crowd of workmen now, waiting to help in the search; but as they caught sight of Richard Glaire, who now came forward, there was a savage groan.

"Ask him where he's put thee bairn, Joe Banks; he knows," cried a shrill voice—that of some woman; and another groan arose, making Richard draw back shivering.

"Look at the white-faced coward," shouted a man. "Ask him, Joe Banks, ask him."

"Nay, nay, lads," said the foreman, sternly. "Ye're aw wrong. I hev asked him, and he's told me. He knows nowt about the poor bairn."

A murmur arose at this, but Joe Banks turned round to where Richard stood.

"You come along o' me, Master Richard, and no one 'll lay a finger on thee whiles thou'rt by my side. He was at home aw night, lads, and it's not him as would do her harm."

The little crowd seemed only half satisfied; but they gave place as, making an effort, the young man stepped out, and then in a purposeless way the search was about to begin, when there was a cheer given, for the vicar came hurrying up the street.

He looked hot and flushed, and his eyes met those of Richard Glaire so sternly that, for the moment, the young man blushed, but he recovered himself directly, to give an insolent stare in return.

"Mr. Banks," exclaimed the vicar, "this is grievous news indeed;" and ignoring the foreman's half-distant manner, he shook his hand warmly.

"Thanky, parson," said Joe, hoarsely.

"You are about to make a general search, of course," he said; "but where are the police?"

"One's gone across to station, and the other's up at the chalk pit," said a voice.

"First of all," said the vicar, "did any one here see Daisy Banks after she went up the road?"

There was silence for a few moments, and then Richard said firmly:

"I saw her for a few moments up by the pit."

"And not after?" said the vicar, fixing his eyes on the young man.

"I object to this cross-examination," said Richard, hotly. "This is not a magistrate."

"Parson asked thee a plain question, lad; give him a plain answer," said Joe, quietly. "Thou'st nowt to fear."

"No, then," said Richard, loudly. "I was at home."

"Mr. Banks, then, you had better take twenty men; you go with these twenty, Podmore; and——"

He hesitated a moment, when Joe Banks said:

"Master Richard will take another twenty."

"And another score will perhaps go with me," said the vicar. "Then we'll each take one road; and mind, my men, every ditch, copse, and pond must be well searched and, above all, mind and ask at every cottage on the road who has passed, and what carts or carriages have gone along since last night."

The parties were soon told off, when the vicar exclaimed:

"But stop! There were two strangers here yesterday."

"Yes," chorused several. "Two ill-looking chaps from one of the big towns."

"Ay," cried big Harry; "and I sin 'em go up towards the chalk pit."

"So did I," said another.

There was silence for a moment or two, and Tom Podmore seemed to feel the place go round, but he roused himself directly as he heard the vicar's clear ringing voice:

"Then if some treacherous, unmanly scoundrel has not carried off, or persuaded this poor girl to leave father, mother, and home for his own bad ends, we have found the clue. But mind this, my lads, we are going to run down those two men, but no violence. Let's take them, but we must prove that they have been guilty."

"Aw raight, parson;" and the whole party were for a rush up the road towards the chalk pit; but the vicar kept them to their separate tasks; and glancing upwards he caught a glimpse of two pale faces at the Big House, and the faces were those of Eve Pelly and Mrs. Glaire.

Then each party started, and the search began.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A FRUITLESS SEARCH.

The chalk pit naturally formed the great attraction, and on reaching it, the spots were pointed out where basket and shawl were found; but though a careful search was made by a portion of the force, nothing was for some time found to account for the disappearance.

The party had, however, divided here, and a portion of them, under Big Harry, had hastened along the road toward the Four Alls—the name of the little public-house where it was expected to hear some tidings of the men who had been seen in the town, and who must have passed, even if they were guiltless of wrong. The vicar, however, chose to remain behind, with about ten of his party, and together they began to make a more careful search about the pit—the first investigation being of the low post-and-rail fence which ran along the edge, to see if it was perfect in every part.

Yes, there was no doubt of it; not a rail was broken, or post bent out of the perpendicular, as would probably have been the case had any one fallen against it or been pushed over. Not even a piece of the shallow turf growing on the very brink of the pit was disordered, and the vicar was about to give up that part of the search, when he made a leap forward, and took from a rough splintered portion of the divided fir-pole which formed the rail a tiny scrap of red worsted, such as might very well have been torn from Daisy's shawl.

"I think we're on the right track, my lads," said the vicar. "Now let's divide, and we'll search the coppice here, along the edge of the pit."

The men went eagerly to work, and searched foot by foot the little thin sprinkling of fir trees and gorse that hung upon the edge of the declivity, but without avail—there was not a spot that could have sheltered a human form that was not scanned, and the divided party met at last upon the low ground at the slope of the hill, where the cart track cut its way in, and the lime-kiln stood half-way into the pit.

The vicar paused for a moment by the kiln, and peered in. It was not burning, and in a few minutes he was able to satisfy himself that no one had been in there, and with a shudder he turned away, spreading his men so that step by step they examined the rough white and grey blocks that had been thrown aside or had fallen. Some were fresh and of the purest white, with here and there delicate traces of the pecteus and cardiums of a former shelly world; others were hoary and grey, and

covered with a frosty lichen; while others, again, were earth-stained and brown.

In accordance with their leader's instructions, each block was eagerly examined, the vicar's idea being that it was possible for a cruel murder to have taken place, and for the token of the hideous crime to have been hidden by laying it in some depression, and piling up the pieces of chalk, of which ample lay ready for hiding a hundred such crimes.

But no; there were foot marks here and there, and traces of the edges of the blocks having been chipped by heavy boots; but no spot could be found where they could satisfy themselves that they had been removed.

By this time some forty more sturdy workmen had come up; the event, in the midst of their enforced idleness from the works, being hailed as an excitement; and any amount of muscle was ready to help if directed.

The long search was, however, in vain; and their leader was pondering as to what he should do next, when a rough voice shouted:

"See here, lads. We'll do ony mander o' thing to find Joe Banks's bairn. Come on! let's hurl ivery bit o' calk out o' the pit."

There was a shout at this, and the men were about to put their project in execution, when the vicar held up his hand.

"It's waste of strength, my lads," he said. "I am fully convinced that none of these blocks have been moved. Better search the lanes along the road."

"Aw raight, parson," was the cry; and the men left the pit to proceed along the road, the vicar on in front, so as to reach the Four Alls.

Before they had gone far they encountered the rest of their party, returning without further success than that of making the announcement that the men they sought had called there about nine, and had then gone on, being taken up for a lift by a man with a cart.

"What man, and what cart?" said one of the police-constables, who had now come up.

The men did not know, and, this being an important point, the whole party now hastened on to the little road-

side inn—a shabby, dilapidated place, whose shed at the side, which represented the stabling, was falling away from the house, and whose premises generally seemed to be arranged by the owner as places for storing rubbish, dirt, and green-scummed pools of water. There was a cart with one wheel, and a mangy horse with one eye, and apparently a ragged hen with one leg, but she put down another, made a low-spirited remark evidently relating to stolen eggs, and went off pecking here and there in a disconsolate manner, as if her search for food were one of the most hopeless pursuits under the sun. There was a garden, roughly fenced in, by the side of the house; but its crop consisted of last year's grey cabbage-stumps; while, but for the sign over the door, nearly defaced, but having visible the words "wines and spirituous," the place could hardly have been taken for a place of refreshment, even though the occupant of this attractive spot stood at the door, showing the potency of the said "wines and spirituous" liquors in his reddened and blotched face, as he leaned against the door-post, smoking a long clay pipe, and staring lazily at the party who now came up.

"Can you give us any information about the two men who came here last night?" said the vicar.

"Say?" said the man, staring.

"Gentleman wants to know wheer them chaps is gone," said the constable.

"How should I know?" said the man, surlily. "Californy or Roosalum, for owt I know."

"No nonsense, Brumby," said the constable. "You'd best speak out. Who wheer they?"

"Friends o' mine," said the man, taking his pipe out of his mouth for a moment, to relieve himself of a tremendous volume of smoke.

"What were their names?"

"How should I know? They come here, and has a bit o' rafrashment, and they goes again. What do I keer, so long as they wares their money."

"Who had they got wi' 'em?"

"Nobbut their own sens."

"But I mean when they comed."

"Look ye here, I hadn't going to answer all your queshtons."

"Well, look here; had they any one wi' 'em when they went away?"

"Nobbut their own sens," said the man, sulkily.

"Well, who gave them a lift?"

"Don't know, on'y as it weer a man in a cart."

"But you must ha' seen his name."

"No, I musn't if it weren't painted on," bawled the man. "What d'yer come wherretin' me for about it? I don't ask my customers who comes in for a gill o' ale wheer they come from, nor wheer they're going."

"Had they a young girl with them?" said the vicar, who was getting out of patience.

"Not as I know on," said the man. "One had nobbut a whip."

There was evidently nothing to be got out of him, so the party returned to Dumford, the policeman undertaking to communicate by telegraph with the towns through which the men would be likely to pass, as this would be the surest and quickest way.

As the day wore on, the other parties returned to assemble and discuss the matter; though there was little to discuss, for Joe Banks had returned without a trace being found of his child, and the same ill fortune had attended Podmore and Richard Glaire.

The latter, as soon as he reached home, however, sought Mrs. Glaire, who was lying down, apparently ill at ease, with Eve in attendance upon her, the young girl rising with a shiver as her cousin entered the room, and leaving without encountering his eyes.

"Where is Daisy Banks, mother?" said Richard hoarsely, as soon as they were alone. "I've kept up this foolery of searching all day, to quiet these people, and now I insist upon knowing where she is."

"I should ask you that," said Mrs. Glaire, angrily: "but if I did I should not learn the truth. Where have you taken her?"

"Taken her?" said Richard, savagely. "Where should I take her? You know I was at home all last night."

"Where you had planned to take her," said Mrs. Glaire coldly.

"I planned!" cried Richard. "Why, I left her with you. Plans, indeed!"

"Daisy Banks was not with me ten minutes," said Mrs. Glaire, quietly. "I said plans, because——"

"Because what?" cried Richard.

"Do you wish me to tell you?"

"Yes, if you have anything to tell."

"Because you paid that chattering ass, Slee, to carry letters to and fro, between you and Daisy, after you had given me your word of honour that you would see her no more. Because you then, after gradually bringing the silly girl over to your purposes, paid or bribed—which you will—Simeon Slee, the man who has been one of the projectors of this wretched strike, to act as your pander to take this girl off to London, to await your coming. It is your doing; so now you had better seek her."

"How did you know all this?"

"How did I know?" said Mrs. Glaire, contemptuously. "How are such things known? You leaned upon a bruised reed, and it broke and entered your hand."

"Did Sim Slee tell you all this, then?" said Richard, stamping with fury.

"Yes; and he would have told me long ago, had I given him what the knave wants—money."

"A treacherous scoundrel!" cried Richard; "trusting him as I did."

"You knew him to be a treacherous, prating scoundrel; so why did you trust him?"

"Because I was a fool," roared the young man, biting his nails with rage.

"Exactly; because you were a fool, and because no honest man would help you to be guilty of the great sin you meant to commit, of stealing the daughter of the man who had been your father's best friend—the man who helped him to make his fortune. Scoundrels are necessary to do scoundrels' work."

"But he cheated me," cried Richard; "he took my money, and he has not performed his promise."

"Of course not," said Mrs. Glaire.

"But when did you know this?" cried Richard.

"You own to it, then?" cried Mrs. Glaire, gazing sharply at him.

"Never mind whether I own it or not. A scoundrel! I'll serve him out for this."

"I have known it only a few hours," said Mrs. Glaire, sinking back on her couch, and watching the young man, as he stamped up and down the room.

"But he has thrown me over," cried Richard. "I don't know where the girl is."

"Who has thrown you over?" said Mrs. Glaire, contemptuously.

"You needn't believe me without you like," said Richard; "but I am speaking the truth now. Sim Slee was to take her across to Lupsthorpe station, and go with her to town."

"Yes."

"And stay with her till I came, after the heat of the row was over; for no one would have missed him."

"Well?" said Mrs. Glaire, contemptuously.

"Well, he has thrown me over," said Richard. "I met him this morning, and found he had not been."

"What did he say?" said Mrs. Glaire.

"Swore he couldn't find her."

"Then the wolf set the fox to carry off the lamb, and now the fox says he has not seen the prey," said Mrs. Glaire, smiling.

"D——n your riddles and fables!" cried Richard, who was beside himself with rage. "I tell you he has sold me."

"What you might have expected," said his mother.

"The scoundrel has hidden her somewhere," cried Richard; "and it's his plan to get more money out of me."

"What you might have expected," said Mrs. Glaire, again. "You had better set the police to watch him and find him out."

"Not while I can do it better myself," said the young man, with a cunning grin upon his countenance. "You have both been very clever, I dare say you think; and if the truth were known, you have been setting Sim Slee to

get her away, so as to marry me to your pet; but you won't succeed."

"You are wrong, Richard; I would not trust Sim Slee with the value of a penny. I gave him ten pounds for his information, and I have not seen him since. You had better employ the police."

"Curse the police!" cried Richard, looking hard at his mother's face, and feeling that she was telling him the truth; "what good are they? I might have been killed before they would have interfered. But I have not done with Master Sim Slee yet."

"Then you will not employ the police?"

"No," said Richard, sharply; "the matter's tangled enough as it is; but he's got the wrong man to deal with, has Sim Slee, if he thinks he has cheated me so easily."

"Better leave him alone," said Mrs. Glaire, wearily. "You have enough to attend to with your own affairs."

"This is my affair," cried Richard.

"Bombast and sound," said his mother. "I suppose you and Slee are in collusion, and this is done to blind me, and the rest of the town. But there, you must follow your own course."

"I mean to," said Richard; and the breach between him and his mother seemed to be getting wider than ever.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A FRIENDLY MEETING.

THERE was a goodly meeting at the Bull and Cucumber that evening, for the discussion of the disappearance of Daisy Banks. Sim Slee was there, and one of the chief spokesmen.

"Well, what do you say, Sim?" said the landlord, with a wink at his other guests, as much as to say, "Let's draw him out."

"Say!" cried Sim; "why, that Dick Glaire's a lungeing villin. Look at him; a man fixed in business as he is, and plenty o' money, and he knows nowt but nastiness. He ought to be hung."

"Where weer you to-day, Sim?" said another. "I didn't see thee helping."

"Helping!" said Sim; "why, I was in the thicket all day. Search indeed! what's the good o' searching for what ain't theer?"

"Do you know wheer she is?" said the landlord.

"If you want to know wheer Daisy Banks is, ask Dicky Glaire, and——"

"And what?" said several, for Sim had stopped short.

"And he wean't tell yow," said Sim. "He knows, though. Why, he's been mad after the lass for months; and if she weer my bairn I'd half kill him; that's what I'd do wi' him. He's a bad lot, and it's a pity as Dumford can't get shoot of him. Such rubbish! he's on'y fit to boon the roads."

"Well, Sim," said the grocer, "when they make you boon master you can use him up o' purpose."

"Hello!" said Sim, "what are yow here? I thowt as the Bull and Cowcumber wasn't good enew for such as thee."

"You niver thowt so, Sim," said the jovial little grocer, laughing, "till I wouldn't give thee any more credit till thou had paid what thee owdst."

"I can pay you any day," said Sim, chinking the money in his pocket.

"Yes, but you wean't," said the grocer, imitating Sim's broad Lincoln dialect. "Yes, I wanted to hear a bit o' the news," he continued, "so I thowt I'd put up the shut, and have a gill and a pipe, same as another man; for I niver object to my 'lowance, as is good for any man as works hard."

"So 'tis, so 'tis," chorussed several.

"How chuff we are to-night," said Sim, with a sneer; "why, yow're getting quite sharp. You wearn't so nation fast wi' your tongue 'fore yow took to trade and was only a bricklayer. It's all very fine for a man to marry a grocer's widow, and take to her trade and money, and then come and teach others, and bounce about his money."

"Oh, I'm not ashamed of having handled the mortar-trowel before I took to the sugar scoop," said the grocer, laughing.

"When it used to be to the boy," continued Sim, mimicking the other's very slow, drawling speech: "'Joey, wilt

thou bring me another brick?' and then thou used to groan because it weer so heavy."

"Sim Slee's in full swing to-night," said another guest.

"He will be if he don't look out, for Tom Podmore says he's sure he had a hand in getting away Daisy Banks," said another; "and Joe Banks is sure of it. I wouldn't be surprised if he hung him."

"Don't you be so nation fast," said Sim, changing colour a little, but laughing it off the next moment. "Iv I were a owry chap like thee, Sam'l Benson, I'd wesh mesen afore I took to talking about other folk. It was Sam'l, you know," continued Sim, to the others, "that owd parson spoke to when he weer a boy. 'When did thee wesh thee hands last, Sam?' he says, pointing at 'em wi' his stick. 'When we'd done picking tates,' says Sam. He, he, he! and that was three months before, and parson give 'im a penny to ware in soap."

There was a hearty laugh at this, in which the man of whom the story was told joined.

"Strange different sort o' man this one to the last parson," said the grocer.

"Ay, he is. Do you mind owd parson's dunk pigs?" said Johnson, the butcher.

"To be sure," said the landlord, rapping his pipe. "I've got four of the same breed now."

"He used to come and see you pretty oftens, didn't he?" said the grocer.

"Oh, yes; he'd come toddling up on the saints' day to Mrs. Winny's there, and sit for a bit, and then come across here, and sit and wait, and have a gill o' ale, and then if there was anybody coming up to church, Jacky Budd—Jacky Budd's father, you know—would come and fetch him, and if there was nobody coming, Jacky used to lock the church doors again and go back home."

"He was a rum one, he was. Fond of his garden, too."

"Well, so's this un," said the landlord. "He's getten it to raights now."

"Course he has," said Slee. "Getten it done for nowt, wi' Tom Podmore and big Harry, and iver so many more wucking for him."

"You let th' parson alone, Sim," said the landlord, who was a bit of an autocrat in his own parlour, "and he'll let thee alone."

"I should hope he would. He's fun me a hot one already," said Sim.

"He's a good sort, is parson," said Johnson, the butcher; "and it's how do, and shake hands, as friendly with ye, as if you was the best in the land."

"Yes," said the grocer; and he don't come begging and borrowing always."

"Begging, no," said Johnson, chuckling. "Why, he's paid me thutty pounds this last ten days for meat."

"Thutty pounds!" said the landlord.

"Ay, all that."

"What for?" said Sim.

"Meat for soup," said Johnson.

"Ah, and I've took a lot of him for grosheries," said the grocer.

"Yes; he's giving away a sight o' money," said the landlord, "to them as is on strike and wants it. He says to me, only yesterday, when I went across to take him a bit o' Marquory—it was some as we'd got very fine—'Thankye, Robinson,' he says, 'so that's Mercury, is it?'—he called it 'Mercury.' 'I never see any before,' he says. 'We call it Good King Henry down in the South.' 'Yes, sir,' I says, 'that's marquory, and as good a vegetable as you can eat.' 'Makes a difference in your trade, this strike, I suppose,' he says. 'Our takings ain't been above half, sir,' I says, 'since it begun.' 'Sorry for it,' he says, 'sorry for it. I don't dislike to see men come and have their pipe and glass in moderation, and then chat after work; and I'm sure, Robinson,' he says, 'you are not the man to let any one exceed.' 'Never do if I can help it, sir,' I says; and then he talked for ever so long, and then he took me in and give me a glass o' wine, and shew'd me his silver cups as he'd won at college, and rowing and running, and one thing and another; and when I was coming away he says, 'Tell me,' he says, 'if you hear of anybody very hard pushed through the strike, and I'll see what I can do.'"

"Here's parson's very good health," said Johnson, the

butcher; and it was drunk by all present but Sim, who uttered a loud, "Yah!"

"They say he's makkin' up to Mrs. Glaire, don't they?" said the grocer.

"Ay, they say so," said the butcher; "and that owd Purley's sister and Miss Primgeon are both in a regular takkin' about it. They've both been wucking slippers for him."

"He was fine and on about Daisy Banks, to-day," said the landlord. "I heerd, too, as Joe Banks quarrelled wi' him for interfering 'bout her, just afore she went."

"How did you hear that?" said the grocer.

"Joe Banks's Missus towd mine," said the landlord. "But, say, lads, what's this 'bout Bultitude's John Maine?"

"Don't know — what?" said first one and then another.

"Why, I hear as he was seen talking to a couple of owry-looking poacher chaps, down the road—them two, as they think, had something to do wi' Daisy Banks going off."

"Yes, I see 'em," said Sim; "and I see John Maine talking to 'em."

"Regular rough couple," continued the landlord. "They comed here just as my Missus was busy wi' her sweeping-brush, and wanted her to buy a three-gill bottle, or give 'em a gill o' ale for it."

"And she wouldn't," said Sim, grinning.

"Yes, she would, and did," said the landlord. "She was all alone in the house; for I was out in the close, and she thowt it best to be civil to 'em; but she kept a pretty sharp eye on 'em all the time."

"Then John Maine's had a hand in it; see if he ain't,' said Sim.

"Don't know so much about that," said the landlord. "Some say as you know more than you keer to tell."

"Perhaps I do, and perhaps I don't," said Sim, sententiously. "There's things as I know on, and things as I don't. I'm going now."

"Tell the owd woman to hap you up well to-night, Sim," said one.

"Say, Sim," said another, "ask her to get out her scithers and coot thee hair."

"You're going agates early, Sim," said another.

"Yes, I'm off," said Sim; "and mebbe it'll be some time before you see me here again, or mebbe I shall be here again to-morrow night. Good-night all;" and he went out, looking very triumphant, telling himself that he had been too much for "that lot," and that he knew what he was about.

There were those present, though, who were not above saying that it was on account of Tom Podmore coming in, to sit near the door, looking wearied out with anxiety as he let his head drop upon his hand, and sat there thoughtful and silent, while those present, knowing his feelings towards the missing girl, changed the subject that they were resuming, and entered upon the question of the duration of the strike.

CHAPTER XXX.

THREATENINGS.

As the days passed, and no information could be obtained respecting Daisy Banks, and the efforts of the police to trace the two strangers proved utterly fruitless, John Maine was in a state of mind not to be envied. By degrees it oozed out more and more that he had been seen with the two men, and the police came down to the farm to question him, looking suspiciously at him, as he told them that they were men he had met once before in the neighbourhood of Nottingham; and when the constables left he had the annoyance of feeling that he would be watched, for it was evident that he was looked upon with suspicion.

Joe Banks had been nearly mad with excitement, and, leaving his sobbing wife day after day, he had searched and researched the country round, aided by Tom Podmore, Harry, and a score of the other men. Richard Glaire had made no show of assisting after the first day, for he had awakened to the fact that the town was not a safe home for him, and it was fully his intention to leave the place

for awhile; but, for his own reasons, he preferred to wait a little longer.

Sim Slee was about now a good deal, and another encounter had taken place between him and Richard, after which Sim had gone round to the vicarage back door to implore help from his wife, asserting that he was half killed, and begging her to come home and attend on him.

As it happened the vicar heard him, and came to see how bad were his injuries, and to offer to set his housekeeper at liberty.

"I'll manage without you, Mrs. Slee, if you like," he said, kindly.

"But I don't like," said Mrs. Slee; "there'll be fifty people here soon for soup and bread, and how can you get shoot of 'em all wi'hout me?"

"Thou must come home, lovely," said Sim, in a dismal voice. "I'm very bad. I've got money enew, too, now to keep us for weeks."

"Where dids't thou get money from?" said Mrs. Slee, sharply.

"Never thou mind," said Sim. "I've gotten it, and now come home."

"But how did you get knocked about like that?" said the vicar, smiling to himself.

"That cursed Dicky Glaire set upon me," moaned Sim, one of whose eyes was swollen up, while there was a cut across the bridge of his nose. "He's mad wi' me because I wouldn't help him to carry off Daisy Banks to London, and he's leathered me this how. But I'll hev it out of him yet."

"Did Dicky Glaire want yow to get her away?" said Mrs. Slee.

"Yes, a coward, and I wouldn't," said Sim, "so he's done it his sen."

"Be careful what you are saying, Mr. Slee," said the vicar, snipping a strip of sticking-plaister off a piece in his pocket-book with his nail-scissors, and breathing upon it to make it warm.

"Keerful," said Sim; "he deserves to be hung for it."

"Do you mean to assert that Mr. Glaire has done

this? Because if so, you will have to substantiate your statement before a magistrate."

"I don't say for certain as he has," said Sim; "but he wanted me to, and I wouldn't. Oh! oh! oh!"

"Stand still, man, and don't be such a cur," cried the vicar, sharply; for he had been applying the plaister to Sim's slight cut, and the hero had begun to howl dismally.

"It's half killing me," cried Sim again.

"Take hold of his head, Mrs. Slee; the cut is nothing at all."

Mrs. Slee seized Sim pretty roughly, and held him by his ears, while the plaister was affixed, the great orator moaning and flinching and writhing till he was set at liberty.

"Is it bad, sir?" said Mrs. Slee, then.

"So bad," said the vicar, "that if a schoolboy of nine or ten received such a drubbing from a playmate, he would have washed his face and said nothing about it."

"Said nowt about it!" cried Sim. "Aye, it's easy for them as ain't hurt to talk. Thou'lt come home wi' me, lovey?"

"No. Go thee gate," said Mrs. Slee.

"Do 'ee come, lovey," said Sim.

"I wean't," said Mrs. Slee, shortly; and without more ado, she took her lord by the shoulders, and guided him to the door, which she closed upon him, leaving him to make his way up the street, vowing vengeance against Richard Glaire, the parson, and all the world.

In fact, mischief was brewing, and would have come to a head sooner but for the episode of Daisy's disappearance. A deputation of the men had waited upon Richard Glaire, and offered terms for coming back to work; but he had obstinately held out for the reparation to be made, increasing the value he had previously set upon the destroyed bands, and declaring that if he were not paid a hundred and fifty pounds damages he would keep the works closed.

"Thou'lt be sorry for this, Maister," said the man who acted as spokesman.

"Sorry!" said Richard, defiantly. "I m sorry I ever had such a set of curs to work for me."

"But we've telled you as it was none o' us."

"I don't care who it was," retorted Richard; "I want a hundred and fifty pounds for the damage done; and I ought to have payment for my losses by the foundry standing still."

"Our wives and bairns 'll soon be pined to dead," said another man.

"You should have thought of that before," said Richard, coldly. "A hundred and fifty pounds made up amongst you, and the fires may be lit, and we'll go on once more; till that's paid I'll keep the place locked up if I'm ruined by it."

Then came the disappearance of Daisy Banks, and it wanted but little on the part of Sim Slee to half madden the weaker spirits against the man who was starving their wives and children, and had robbed Joe Banks of his daughter.

It so happened that Joe Banks, on the day following Sim's doctoring, about a fortnight after the disappearance, during which time he had not seen Mrs. Glaire, but only Eve, who had been again and again to try and administer comfort to Mrs. Banks, came upon a knot of men, listening to an oration made by Sim Slee, who, as soon as he saw Joe coming up in company with Tom Podmore, who was his staunch and faithful ally throughout, cried loudly:

"Here he comes! Here comes the down-trodden, ill-used paytriot, who has served the rotten family for thirty year, and then been robbed for his pains. He's agoing to join my brotherhood now, lads—him and Tom Podmore.'

"Hooray!" cried the men.

"And he'll be a captain and a leader among us as is going to beat down the oppressors and robbers of our flocks and herds. He's agoing, lads, to pull down with us the bloated Aristorchus, as is living on his oil olive, and honey, while we heven't bread to put in the mouths of our bairns."

There was a groan here from the little crowd, some of whom readily accepted Sim Slee's Aristorchus, as they would have taken in any loud sounding word in their present humour.

"Come on, brave captain, as hev had your eye-lids opened to the malice and wickedness of your employer, and join them as is going to groan no more under the harrows and plough-shares of oppression. It is said as the ox or beast shan't be muzzled as treadeth out the corn, and we ain't agoing to let that oppressor, Dicky Glaire, muzzle us any more."

"Hooray!" cried the growing crowd.

"Come on, then, brave captain. Lads, Joe Banks is a man as we'll be proud to serve wi'; and wi' Tom Podmore too, for they've cast off their slough"—Sim called this "sluff"—"of blindness, and hev awaked to the light and glory of liberty. Come on."

"What do you mean?" said Joe Banks, firmly.

"Mean, brave captain and leader!" cried Sim, making his plaid waistcoat wrinkle with his exertions; "why, that we're going to trample down him as robbed thee of thy bairn."

"Who's that?" said Joe Banks, sternly.

"Who's that? Ask anybody here if it ain't Dicky Glaire, the oppressor, as is going to sneak outer the town to-night to catch the mail train over yonder at the station, and then going to laugh and sneer and mock at the poor, grey old father as he's deceived, and—"

"It's a lie," roared Joe. "Who says Richard Glaire took away my poor murdered bairn?"

"Everybody," said Sim, who was standing on a wall about five feet high, his plaistered face giving him rather a grotesque aspect. "Everybody says it."

"No," roared Joe, "it's you as says it, you lying, chattering magpie. Howd thee tongue, or I'll—"

He seized the speaker by the legs, and had him down in an instant, clutched by the throat, and began shaking him violently.

"Go on," said Sim, who this time preserved his presence of mind. "I ain't the first paytriot as has been a martyr to his cause; kill me if you like."

"Kill thee, thou noisy starnel of a man! Say as it's a lie again your maister, or I'll shake thee till thou dost."

"I wean't say it's a lie," cried Sim. "Ask anybody if it ain't true."

Joe Banks looked round furiously, and a chorus broke out of, "It's true, lad ; it's true."

"There," cried Sim, triumphantly. "What hev you to say to that? Ask Tom Podmore what he thinks."

"I will," cried Joe Banks, who was somewhat staggered by the unanimity of opinion. "Tom Podmore, speak out like a true man and tell these all as it's a lie."

Tom remained silent.

"D'ye hear, Tom? Speak out," cried Joe,

"I'd rather not speak," said Tom, quietly.

"But thou must, lad, thou must," cried Sim. "Are you going to see a man a martyr for a holy cause, when you can save him?"

"Speak! speak!" cried Joe, panting with rage and emotion; "tell 'm you know it's a lie, Tom."

"I can't," said Tom, who was driven to bay, "for I believe Richard Glaire has got her away."

"Theer, I telled you," said Sim. "He wanted me to help him, only you wean't believe."

"No, no, no," roared Joe; "and I wean't believe it now. He wouldn't, he couldn't do it. He told me he hadn't; and he wouldn't tell me a lie."

The little crowd opened as the true-hearted old fellow strode away, without turning his head, and Tom Podmore followed him towards his home, and at last spoke to him.

Joe turned upon him savagely.

"Go away," he cried. "I've done wi' you. I thowt as Tom Podmore were a man, instead o' one o' them chattering maulkin-led fools ; but thou'rt like the rest."

Tom Podmore stopped short, with his brow knit, whilst Joe Banks passed on out of sight.

"He'll find out, and believe different some day," said Tom, slowly. "Poor old man, it's enough to break his heart. But I wean't break mine."

As he stood, the noise of cheering came from where he had left Sim Slee talking, and he stood listening and thinking.

"They'll be doing him a mischief 'fore they've done, and then they'll end the old works. D—n him! I hate him," he cried, grinding his teeth; "but I can't stand still and let Sim Slee's lot bruise and batter his face

as they would till they'd most killed him. He's soft, and smooth, and good-looking, and I'm——well, I'm a rough un," he continued, smiling with contemptuous pity on himself. "It's no wonder she should love him best, poor lass; but she'd better hev been a honest lad's wife—missus to a man as wouldn't hev said an unkind thing to her to save his life. But they say it's woman-kind-like: they takes most to him as don't keer for 'em."

He stood thinking irresolutely as the noise and cheering continued, and once he turned to go, but the next moment he was himself, and saying softly:

"Daisy, my poor little lass, it's for thee—it's for thee; he strode hastily to the Big House, knocked, and was admitted.

"Tell Mr. Richard I want to see him," said Tom; and the servant-girl smiled pleasantly at the fine sturdy young fellow.

"I don't think he'll see thee, Mr. Podmore," said the girl, "because he's so cross about the foundry people. I'll tell him a gentleman wants to see him."

She tripped away, and in a few minutes Richard came down to stand scowling at him.

"What do you want?" he said, glaring at his rival.

Tom Podmore writhed mentally, and his nerves tingled with the desire to take Richard Glaire by the throat, and shake him till he could not breathe; but he controlled himself, and said, sturdily:

"I come to tell thee some ill news."

"What is it?" said Richard, thrusting his hand into his breast, for his visitor had taken a step forward.

Tom Podmore saw the motion and smiled, but he paid no further heed, and went on bluntly:

"Thou was going away by train to-night."

"Who says so?" cried Richard, turning pale.

"The lads out there—Sim Slee's gang," said Tom; "and I come to warn thee."

"Warn me of what?" said Richard.

"To warn thee as they mean to lay wait for thee, and do thee a mischief."

"Who says so?"

"I know it," said Tom; "so if you'll take a good bit of advice thou'lt stay at home, and not go out."

"It's a trick—a trap," cried Richard. "If it were true, you're not the man to come and tell me."

"Why not?" said Tom, bluntly.

"Because you hate me, and believe I've taken away your wretched wench."

"D—n thee!" cried Tom, seizing him by the arm and throat; and as he brought the young fellow to his knees, quite paralyzing his effort to get his hand into his breast; "thou may'st say what thee likes again me; but if thee speaks ill of her I can't bear it; so I warn thee. Hate thee I do, and yet I come to tell thee of danger, and——"

A faint shriek made Tom start, for, pale as death, Eve Pelly rushed to Richard's help, and clutched at Tom Podmore's sturdy arms which dropped at her touch as if those of Eve had been talismanic.

"Aw raight, Miss," he said, smiling. "I wean't hurt him; but I come to do him good, and he made me mad."

"Mad, yes," cried Richard, who had regained his feet, and now drew a pistol. "You were mad to come here; but I'm ready for you and the rest of your rascally crew, and for all your malicious traps and plans."

"Richard!" shrieked Eve, who tried to catch his arm; but she was flung off, and would have fallen, but for Tom Podmore, before whom she stood, screening him as she begged him to leave the house.

"Yes, Miss, I'll go," said Tom, smiling; "not as I'm afraid of him and his pistol. What I did he browt upon himself. I've done what I thowt was raight, so he must tak' his chance. I on'y come to warn him as there's a dozen or two of the lads as listen to Sim Slee made themselves into a gang agen him."

"What, our workmen?" cried Eve.

"Well, only some o' the outsiders, Miss; t'others wean't have nowt to do wi' it. That's all."

As he spoke he smiled sadly at the poor pale face before him, and then was gone.

CHAPTER XXXI.

PODMORE SEEKS AN ALLY.

Tom Podmore walked straight away from the Big House listening to the noise and shouting as he went to the vicarage, where Murray Selwood was in conference with Jacky Budd, respecting certain improvements to be made in the shrubbery, when the season suited for planting.

"And what would you plant here, Budd?" he said to the thirsty soul.

"Oh, I should put a few laurels there, sir."

"And in that corner?"

"Oh, I should put a few *laurels* there, sir."

"And in the centre bed?"

"A few laurels, sir."

"And by the bare patch by the edge?"

"Just a few laurels, sir."

"And along the side of the house?"

"Couldn't put anything better than a few laurels, sir."

"And for the new hedge to separate the two gardens?"

"Oh, a few laurels, sir."

"Then you would put laurels all about?"

"Well, yes, sir; you see they're so evergreen and—"

"Oh, here's Podmore," said the vicar, going down to the gate. "Well, my lad, how are you? I'm glad to see you."

"Thanky' kindly, sir," said Tom, pressing firmly the hand given to him in so friendly a way. "Can I speak to you a minute?"

"Of course you can. Come into the house."

He led the way into the vicarage, and placed a chair for Tom in the study, but the young man did not take it, and remained silent.

"I'm deeply grieved," said the vicar, laying his hand on the young fellow's shoulder; "deeply, Tom Podmore. I had hoped that she had come to her senses, and made a better choice."

"Don't, sir, please don't," said Tom, turning away his head; and laying his arm against the wall, he placed his

forehead against it, and his broad shoulders heaved. "I can't bear to hear a word spoke again her, sir."

"I'll not speak against her, Podmore, believe me, poor girl; and I deeply regret that her father was too blind to listen to me."

"You spoke to him, then?" said Tom, sadly.

"I did; and I have striven hard to be friends with Richard Glaire, and to bring him to a better feeling; but I failed with both."

"Then you think as I do, sir," said Tom, sadly; "you think as she's been took away?"

"I cannot help thinking so," was the reply. "If I am misjudging, I am very sorry; but I have done everything I could to trace her, e'en to having a man down from town, who has been constantly searching ever since she disappeared, and he has discovered nothing."

"And have you done this, sir?"

"Yes; why should I not?" said the vicar, sadly. "But you have come for some reason, Podmore. What can I do for you?"

"Well, sir, I've comed about these goings on up yonder in the town."

"There's no fresh violence, I hope," cried the vicar, hastily.

"Not as yet, sir; but there's going to be, I'm afraid. You see, sir, there's about a couple of dozen as has been got over by Sim Slee, and he's made 'em join him in some kind of brotherhood, as he calls it. The older men as has got heads on their shoulders laughs at it all, and looks upon Sim as a chattering fool."

"Fools do mischief sometimes," said the vicar, half to himself.

"Yes, sir, they do; but all the best of the men tak' Sim Slee at what he's worth; but there's a few, you see, as are 'mazed by his big words, and are ready to be led into any mischief."

"Yes; and you know of this?" said the vicar, anxiously.

"Yes, sir, I've found as they've got to know that Mr. Richard Glaire's going away to night."

"Is he going away?" said the vicar.

"So Sim Slee's telling on 'em sir; but what does it mean 'bout Sim Slee being so thick wi' him just afore, and now dead again' him?"

"Some quarrel," said the vicar. "Sim Slee must be made to speak out somehow."

"He's been speaking to some purpose to-day," said Tom, sharply; "and I think they mean mischief against the maister to-night, when he's going away."

"And you've come to tell me this!" said the vicar, looking at the sturdy, rough young fellow admiringly.

"Yes," said Tom, simply. "I went and told him at the house, but he turned on me, and said things I couldn't bear, and made me grip him, when Miss Eve came out and atween uz, and that stopped me."

"Well?"

"And then he pulled out a pistol and threatened me."

"What made you——grip him?" said the vicar, using the young man's words.

"He—spoke again' her," said Tom, hoarsely; and as he spoke the veins in his forehead swelled, and an angry frown came upon his countenance.

"Then you went to the house to warn Richard Glaire of his danger, and he——"

"Threatened me, and said it was a trap I was laying," said Tom.

"And then you came to tell me he was in danger. And what for?"

Tom was silent for a few moments. Then glancing up in the clear firm face which seemed to demand an answer, he said, almost in a whisper:

"I couldn't abear for him to be knocked about, if I could stop it."

"For Daisy's sake?"

"For Daisy's sake," said the young man; and the next moment the vicar's hand had closed upon his in a firm grasp.

"Then we'll try and save him, Tom," said the vicar, quietly. "I'm very glad you've come, Tom. I've seen very little of you lately."

Tom looked up at him curiously, said something about

being much obliged, and was turning to go, when the vicar stopped him.

"We must make some plans for the poor fellow's safety," he said. "He must not be hurt. I'll go up first, and try if I can prevail upon him not to go."

Tom nodded.

"And if he will not be prevailed upon, we must try and act as we can. I think and hope that they will not attempt to touch him while I am by his side."

Tom shook his head.

"I wouldn't, sir, because I know you; but time back I would, if there'd been twenty parsons round him. They won't hurt you, sir, but they'll beat him if he attempts to go."

"Let's hope not; let's hope not," said the vicar; and now I'll go up to the house, while you'll wait here."

"Wait here?" said Tom.

"Yes; why not? I shall want to lay my hands upon you at a moment's notice. But stop. If he goes, it will be by the mail. That's at eight, and the station is two miles, say three quarters of an hour for ample time. If he means to go, he will go afoot, so as not to excite attention."

"Yes; and he'll go by the little door in the wall at the bottom of the garden, and off across the home close," said Tom.

"Do you know that?" said the vicar.

"No, sir; but that's how he used to go to meet her; and as he's going to join her to-night, I thowt that's the way he'd go."

"Very likely," said the vicar; "and they're sure to know it and watch. But look here, Tom Podmore, are you willing to help him get away?"

"Yes, sir."

"To join her?

"Yes; I was thinking, that mebbe if he got away to join the poor bairn he'd marry her; for I s'pose he's fond o' the poor lass. But he must be that. She'd mak' onny man—the very worst—fond on her."

"Do you know any one you could get here to help you?" said the vicar. "I mean a stout sturdy fellow with brains,

who could be depended on to help you back me up if we have to make a struggle for it."

"John Maine, sir, at Bultitude's."

"The very man. Get him here, and keep him till I come back."

"I will, sir; but, say, parson—Mr. Selwood, sir—for the Lord's sake don't let Dick Glaire take that pistol thing. If they get hold of him now, they'll beat him sore, but if he should shute a man, they'll niver let him see the light again."

"I'll do my best, Podmore," said the vicar, sadly. "You do yours."

They parted at the gate, bound on the same mission—that of saving the man who was making them both sick at heart with the desire that they felt could never be fulfilled.

CHAPTER XXXII.

JESSIE'S TROUBLES.

Affairs were not very satisfactory at the farm, and Jessie's eyes more than once looked as if they had been red with crying. For the girl was greatly troubled at heart, since John Maine's behaviour puzzled her.

It was impossible for anything of note to take place in Dumford without the news of it reaching the farm, so that she soon heard that Daisy, her old friend and schoolfellow, had disappeared; that the two rough fellows who had been hanging about were supposed to have had something to do with her disappearance; while, to make matters more complicated, John Maine had been seen talking to these two men, and had afterwards warned her about holding communication with Daisy.

John Maine had always been civil and pleasant to Daisy. Daisy had more than once laughingly said she liked him. Now she was gone, John Maine's behaviour was very strange. Could he have had anything to do with getting her away, and was he in any way acting with Richard Glaire, whom some people suspected of complicity?

No: she would not believe anything against him, come

what might; but there was some secret connected with his earlier life that he kept back, and—she could not say why—she thought he ought to be more trusting and communicative with her. Not that there was anything between them, though she told herself she thought she did like John Maine—a little.

Old Bultitude was very cross and snappish too, and he had taken it somewhat to heart that Daisy should have been the companion and friend of his Jessie.

"See here, lass," he said, "thou must howd no more communication with that bairn o' Banks's. She's a bad un."

"Oh, uncle!" exclaimed Jessie, "she may have been robbed and murdered."

"Not she," said old Bultitude, filling his pipe and ramming the tobacco in viciously. "If she had been, they'd ha' fun her body. Folks don't rob and murder, unless it's to get money. Daisy Banks had no money wi' her; and, as to being jealous, I hardly think Tom Podmore, as she pitched over, would murder her—but there's no knowing."

A few minutes later Eve Pelly arrived at the farm, looking pale and thin; and the two girls were soon telling each other their troubles—Eve with a quiet reticent manner, Jessie all eagerness to make the girl she looked upon as her superior the repository of her inmost thoughts.

Eve took care not to let Jessie know that this was to be almost a formal leave-taking, for she had come down after asking Mrs. Glaire's leave, and with the full intention of yielding to her wishes.

The conversation naturally turned upon Daisy and her disappearance, when Jessie broke out impetuously with—

"Well, it's no use to keep it back, Miss Eve. I've known a deal more than I've cared to tell you, but your cousin and Daisy have for months past been thick as thick."

"Don't speak like that, Jessie," cried Eve, flushing up.

"I must when it's for your good, Miss Eve," said Jessie, warmly; "and if the truth was known, I believe

Mr. Richard has had her carried off to London or somewhere."

"It is impossible, Jessie," cried Eve. "My cousin would never be so base."

"Well, I don't know as to that," retorted Jessie; "it's base enough to be pretending to be engaged to one young lady and carrying on with another."

"Jessie!"

"Well, it's the truth. A gentleman told me that he had often seen them together. Oh, Miss Eve, dear, I am sorry. I didn't mean to hurt you."

She was down on her knees before her visitor directly after, begging her pardon, and kissing her, for Eve's face had sunk in her hands, and she was sobbing bitterly. A minute before and she was ready to fight energetically on behalf of the man who was to have been her husband, but now her defences had been turned, and she gave up.

She soon dried her eyes, though, and when Jessie would have turned the conversation to another point she resumed it herself.

"I've been thinking about that very, very much," she said; "night and day—night and day."

"Poor child!" said Jessie, stroking her face. "It must be terribly hard to feel jealous."

"No, no, no, no," said Eve, hastily. "I did not mean that; but about poor Daisy's disappearance. You know they found her shawl and basket."

"Yes," said Jessie, nodding.

"Well," said Eve, hesitating—"don't you think it possible that anybody who hated her very much might—might——"

"Might have killed her?" said Jessie, looking at Eve strangely.

"Yes," said Eve, with a shudder.

Jessie's eyes dilated as she looked at the speaker, and thought of her uncle's words a short time before.

"It is very terrible to think on," said Jessie, slowly.

"Yes," said Eve, in an agitated voice; "but it is almost more terrible for any one you love—you care for, to be thought guilty of having taken the poor creature away."

"But who could have had any such feeling towards poor Daisy," exclaimed Jessie, "except one? and I don't think Tom Podmore——"

"Hush!" cried Eve, laying her hand upon her friend's arm, "he's coming now across the field."

"So he is," cried Jessie, starting and turning pale, for a flood of strange thoughts came across her mind. John Maine and Tom Podmore had been so intimate. John Maine had been so strange, and in his way had warned her about thinking any more of Daisy. Was that to throw her off the scent, and to keep her from grieving after and trying to find where Daisy had gone? The very room seemed to swim round for a few moments, as she recalled some mysterious acts on the part of the man she loved; and she shuddered as the idea suggested itself to her that her uncle and Eve might be right, and poor Daisy had been done to death by her old lover, with his friend for accomplice.

It was then with a feeling of relief that she saw Eve rise to go, saying:

"Let me go out through the garden, Jessie, and then I can get into the lane without being seen by your visitor."

"Yes, yes," said Jessie, hastily; "but, dear darling Miss Eve, pray don't say what you have said to me to another soul."

"No," said Eve, sadly, "I should not do that;" and then her friend saw her out through the garden, and returned to see the young man of whom they had been speaking side by side with John Maine, in earnest conversation across the yard.

Jessie had good cause to start and think over the matters of the past few days, for a great deal of unpleasantry had taken place at the farm, all of which, when analysed, tended to help the dreadful suspicion; and, as she thought it over, she determined in her own mind that no temptation should ever cause her to swerve, since she saw how the weakness of one vain girl had brought such misery to so many homes.

She tried to drive away the suspicion that had been planted and replanted in her heart; but it was of no use,

and she turned at last to her own room, to have a cry to herself—a woman's fomentation for a mental pain; but in this case it was of no avail.

Old Bultitude was morose and harsh with his labourers, going up in a tall tower-like structure which commanded a view of the old farm, and called by the builder a gazebo, but by the labourers a gozzybaw, and from here old Bultitude watched his men and found fault to a degree that Jessie felt must be caused by something out of the ordinary course, while most of his remarks had, it was plain enough, an indirect application to unfulfilled work appertaining to John Maine.

Then Tom Brough, the keeper, had managed to find his way again and again to the farm, to have long conversations with the old farmer, who made a point of asking his advice about this beast, or that cow; about the hay off the twenty acres; and the advisability of thrashing out the wheat from such and such a one of the neatly-made, long-backed stacks in the rick-yard.

John Maine, however, had seemed to bear this shifting of the farmer's confidence pretty fairly; and Jessie had seen it with pain, as she whispered to herself that the true interpretation of the changes in the young man, which she had seen from day to day, was that he had something on his mind which she was not to share.

"Yes; he has something on his mind," she said; "and he does not confide in me."

John Maine seemed to confide in no one; he only behaved strangely, night after night letting himself out, to be gone for hours, sometimes to return wet through, little thinking that he had been watched; and that Jessie, with tears and bitterness of heart, knew all of his goings out and comings in; and it was only by accident, and from the fact of her warning him, that he became aware that she had more than once screened his absence.

It was one night about eleven. Everybody in the early house had gone to rest an hour and a half before, as John Maine stole downstairs softly, and was about to turn the key of a back-door, when a warm hand was laid upon his, and a voice he well knew whispered—

"If you value your home here, go back to bed. Some

one has told my uncle that you go out o' nights, and he is on the watch."

"Jessie!"

He stretched out his hands, but they only came in contact with the whitewashed wall, and he knew that he was alone.

But had any one spoken, or was it only fancy? No; it was no fancy. His motions had been watched, and Jessie had come between him and trouble. As to the spy upon his actions, that was plain enough. Tom Brough had been busy, and had seen him when watching of a night, and what should he do? He had his object for these nocturnal rambles, and he was bound to continue them, but this night he was bound to stay.

Yes, he must stay if only for Jessie's sake; and casting off his indecision he returned softly to his room, where he threw off his things and went to bed.

An hour slowly passed, during which he lay restless and wakeful. Then, when worn out with restless impatience, and half determined to go out at all hazards, a step was heard in the passage, a board creaked; there was a light shining beneath the door, and then after a pause the handle was turned gently, and the light flashed in his face.

"Maine! John Maine!" said the farmer, sharply.

"Yes; what is it? Anything wrong?" said the young man, starting up.

"One of the horses seems very uneasy," said the farmer. "I'm afraid there's something wrong in the stable. I came to ask you to go down, but he seems quieter now, and mebbe it isn't worth while. Try and keep yoursen wacken for 'bout an hour, and if you hear owt go down and see."

John Maine said he would, and old Bultitude went off, muttering to himself, while the young man lay thinking and wondering how he was to carry out his plans in the future. What was he to do? How was he to do it? The only way he could see out of the difficulty was that the burden must be thrown on the shoulders of Tom Podmore.

Day had hardly broken before John Maine, who had

heard no more of the restless horse, was up, and that day, seeking out Tom Podmore, he had a long and earnest conversation with him, with the result of getting his mind more set at ease.

And now it had come about in turn that Tom Podmore had had to seek out John Maine, to ask his help, with the result that, old Bultitude being away, his foreman just went in and told Jessie he was going out; and as she did not turn her face to him as he spoke, he went away sighing heavily; while, pale and trembling, Jessie ran to the window, and, in hiding behind the blind, watched the two young men till they were out of sight.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A THANKLESS TASK.

MEANWHILE the vicar had missed Eve, who had taken another route, and made his way up to the big house, where he was shown into the room to find Mrs. Glaire lying, very pale and weak, upon the couch.

She apologised for not rising, and as he took her hand, he felt that it was hot and feverish.

"I ought to be the doctor," he said, pleasantly, as he retained the hand. "There's too much fever here."

"No doctor will cure that," she said, with a sad smile. "I only want peace of mind, and then I shall be well; and you have come to bring more bad news."

"Oh," said the vicar, carelessly, "I only wanted a bit of a chat with your son."

"Mr. Selwood," said Mrs. Glaire, "don't please speak to me like that. It is dreadful to me; and makes me feel as if I could not trust and believe in the one man in whom I wish to confide."

"Then in Heaven's name," he began, but she interrupted him.

"I have had faith and trust in you, Mr. Selwood, from the first day you came."

"Then you shall continue it," he said, firmly. "I was reticent because I thought you too ill to bear bad tidings."

"I can bear all," she said, softly; "pray tell me the worst."

"Well," said he, quietly, "we will not talk of worst, for there is no danger that cannot be warded off."

"If my son likes?" said Mrs. Glaire.

"If your son likes," continued the vicar. "The fact is, Mrs. Glaire, the people are getting furious against him, and without going into the question of right or wrong, the sufferings of their wives and children are maddening the men. This lock-out ought to end."

"Yes," said Mrs. Glaire, sighing, "it ought."

"It was a dastardly trick, that destruction of the machinery, but I believe it was the work of one brain, and one pair of hands."

"Why do you think so?"

"I have had endless communications with the locked-out men, and, as far as I can judge character, I find them very rough, very independent, but, at the same time, frank and honest, and I cannot find one amongst them who does not look me full in the face, with a clear unblushing eye, and say, 'Parson, if I know'd who did that dirty sneaking business, I'd half kill him.' This in these or similar words."

Mrs. Glaire bowed her head.

"Yes," she said; "you have given the men's character in those words, but they are cruelly bitter against my son."

"They are," said the vicar, hesitating to tell his news.

"And they think he has persuaded Daisy Banks to leave her home."

"Almost to a man, though her father holds out."

"Joe Banks always will be staunch," said Mrs. Glaire. "And you think with the men about that, Mr. Selwood?"

"I would rather not answer that question," he said.

"Then we will not discuss it," she replied, rather hotly. "But you came to bring me some tidings, Mr. Selwood," she continued, holding out her hand. "Forgive me if I feel as a mother, and defend my son."

"I am here to defend him too," said the vicar, taking and kissing the hand extended to him; and as he did so the door softly opened, and Eve glided into the room, to half shrink back and retire; but on hearing the vicar's

words she sank into a seat as if unnerved, and the conversation went on.

"Tell me now, what is the danger?" said Mrs. Glaire.

"It is this," said the vicar; "I am firmly persuaded that this house is a sanctuary, and that for the sake of yourself and your niece, Mr. Richard Glaire is safe so long as he stays here."

"And he will stay here till I can bring him to reason about these people. I would pay the money he demands at once, but he insists that it shall be the hard earnings of his workmen themselves, and I am powerless."

"I am willing to lend the men the amount myself, but they will not take it, and I am afraid it would not be received if its source were known."

"No," said Mrs. Glaire, "you must not pay it. My son would never forgive you. But go on."

"I repeat," said the vicar, "that your son is safe while he remains here."

"And I say that he shall stay," said Mrs. Glaire, sharply. "He shall not leave. He has no intention of leaving."

"He has made up his mind, it seems, to leave by the mail-train to-night," said the vicar; and as the words left his lips, and Mrs. Glaire started into a sitting position, a faint cry behind made them turn round, and the vicar had just time to catch Eve in his arms, as she was gliding to the floor.

"Poor child!" he muttered, as he held her reverently, and then placed her in a reclining chair, while a shadow of pain passed across his face, as he felt for whom this display of trouble and suffering was caused.

"It is nothing, nothing, Mr. Selwood—aunt," faltered Eve, fighting bravely to overcome her weakness; "but, aunt, you will not let him go. Mr. Selwood, you will not let him be hurt."

"No, my child, no," he said, sadly, "not if my arm can save him."

"Thank you; I knew you would say so, you are so brave and strong," she cried, kissing his hand; and as her lips touched the firm, starting veins, a strange hot thrill of excitement passed through his nerves, but only to be

quenched by the bitter flood of misery that succeeded it; and then, making a mighty effort over self, he turned to Mrs. Glaire, who was speaking:—

"But are you sure—do you think it is true?" she exclaimed.

"I believe it," he said, quietly; "and it is absolutely necessary that he should on no pretence leave the house."

"And who says I am to be a prisoner?" asked Richard, entering the room.

"I, for one," said the vicar, "if you value your safety, I may say your life."

"And by what right do you come meddling again with my private affairs?" said Richard, offensively.

"The right of every man who sees his neighbour's life in danger to come and warn him."

"Then don't warn me," said Richard; "I don't want warning. It's all rubbish."

"It is no rubbish that a certain party of the men are holding meetings and threatening to injure you," said the vicar, rather warmly.

"Bah! they're always doing that, and it don't frighten me," said Richard, coarsely.

"Then you were not going, Richard?" said his mother, eagerly. "You were not thinking of being so mad?"

"Going, no; not I," said Richard, "though I don't see anything mad in it."

Eve gave a sigh of relief, which sounded like a knell to the vicar, who, however, said frankly—

"I am very glad then that I have been deceived."

"And," said Richard, sneeringly, "next time you hear a cock-and-bull story about me, perhaps you will keep it to yourself, sir, and leave me to go my ways in peace."

"Richard!" exclaimed Mrs. Glaire, while, with a flush of shame upon her face, Eve rose and hastily placed her hand in the vicar's, saying softly—

"Oh, Mr. Selwood."

Only those three words, but they were balm to him, as he pressed the soft little hand, and raised it to his lips, while, stung by this display, Richard started forward to

make some offensive observation, but the door opened, and the maid appeared.

"Well, what is it?" cried Richard. "Why didn't you knock?"

"I did, sir," said the girl, "but you didn't hear. Jacky Budd says, sir, he can't carry your portmantle across the close because of the stiles, and he must take it to the station in a barrow."

"In time for the mail-train, Mr. Glaire?" said the vicar, in spite of himself, though, for Eve's sake, he regretted it afterwards.

"D——n!" snarled Richard. "No,—go away. Such fools."

He ground his teeth and stamped about the room, while Mrs. Glaire's eyes sought those of the vicar, and in her apologetic look he read plainly enough the mother's shame for the graceless boy she had brought into the world.

The look of triumph passed from his countenance as rapidly as it had come, as he caught a glance of sorrow and appeal from Eve, which seemed to say, "Forgive him and save him against himself."

"You will give up all thought of going now, Mr. Glaire," he said, quietly. "Of course you wished to keep your departure a secret; but you see the intelligence reached me, and is now perhaps the property of the whole town."

"Through you?" said Richard, recovering himself, and speaking with a cunning sneer upon his face.

"This is no time for sneers, Mr. Glaire," said the vicar, calmly. "The information was brought to me direct from the meeting."

"By one of your spies?"

"By one of the workmen whom I have made my friend, and whom you have made your enemy; and he sends me as his messenger to pour coals of fire upon your head, saying, 'Save this man, for if he goes out to-night it may be at the cost of his life.' Mr. Glaire, you will not go now?"

"Not go!" roared Richard, bringing his fist down heavily upon the table. "But I will go. Look here;

I start from this house at seven o'clock to catch the mail-train; now go and tell the scoundrels you have made your friends—the men you have encouraged in their strike against me."

"I encouraged them?" said the vicar, smiling at the absurdity of the charge, when he had striven so bravely for peace.

"Yes; you who have fed their wives and children, and lent them money so as to enable them to hold out against me—you, whose coming has been a curse to the place, for you have fostered the strike from the beginning."

"There is no time to argue that, Mr. Glaire," said the vicar, quietly; "and let me advise you once more. Give up this foolish idea of leaving, if not for your own sake, for that of your mother and your cousin here."

"I shall not," cried Richard. "I have made my arrangements, and I shall go, and let the blood of the man be on his own head who tries to stop me."

"As you will," said the vicar, calmly, as he turned to go.

"Mr. Selwood!"

"Mr. Selwood!"

The two women appealed to him in a breath, but he did not look at them, merely fixed Richard with his eyes, as he said quietly—

"Then you must be saved against your will."

The next minute he was gone.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SAVED IN SPITE OF HIMSELF.

THE street was getting pretty full of people as the vicar walked sharply back towards his house, but they were all remarkably quiet. Sim Slee was there, but he turned off down a side lane, and there was this ugly appearance in their mien, that those who generally had a nod and smile for him refused now to meet the vicar's eye.

He knew it would be madness to try and persuade Sim's party against their plans, and only so much wasted time, so he contented himself with preparing his own, and

to his great satisfaction, found Tom Podmore and his other ally in waiting.

As he was passing the Bull and Cucumber though, Robinson, the landlord, made a sign to him that he wished to speak, and the vicar went up to him.

"Ah, Robinson, how's your wife?"

"She's a very poor creature, sir. She coot her hand the other day with a bit of pot—old cheeny, and it's gone bad. She hasn't looked so bad ta year as she does now."

"I'm sorry to hear this."

"It's a bad job, sir, for she can't side the room, or remble the kitchen things, or owt. She tried to sile the milk this morning, and had to give it up and let the lass do it instead."

"Sile the milk?" said the vicar. "Ah, you mean strain it?"

"Ah, wi' uz," said the landlord, "we always call it sile. We strain a thing through a temse."

"Oh, do you?" said the vicar, wondering whether there was any connection between temse and tammies or tammy cloth. "But you were going to say something important to me, were you not?"

"Well, I weer, sir; only I shouldn't like it to seem to ha' come from me. Fact is, I were down at bottom o' the close in the bit of a beck, picking some watter cress for tea, and fine and wetcherd [wet shod] I got, when, as I was a stooping there, I heered Master Sim Slee cooming along wi' two or three more, and blathering about; and I heered him talking o' you and Master Dicky Glaire, and it were plain enew that they was makking some plans, and not for good, mind you. I hadn't going to tell tales out o' school, but if you'd keep at home to-night, parson——"

"You fancy there's mischief brewing?" said the vicar, sternly.

"Well, yes, sir, I do," said the landlord. "You see, the men hold a kind of lodge or brotherhood meeting at my place, and I can't help knowing of some o' their doings."

"Well, Mr. Robinson, if mischief is brewing, it's my

business to try and spoil the brew ; so I am going out to-night, and if you've any respect for me, you'll come and help me in my task."

He hurried on, and a short time after, the landlord saw him go by, with Tom Podmore and John Maine following at a short distance.

"Parson's a chap with brains in his head," said the landlord. "He's got a couple of good bull-dogs to tramp at his heels ; and, dal me, if they aint beckoned Big Harry to 'em. Well, I'll go too. I aint going to faight ; but if I see any man hit parson, dal me, but I'll gi' him a blob."

The vicar was not without hope that Richard would think better of the matter, and keep indoors, and after a turn or two up and down the street, which was pretty well thronged, the men looking stolid and heavy, but civilly making way for him, and always with a friendly word, it seemed as if there was nothing to fear, when from the lane at the side of the Big House there came a loud shout, and in an instant the whole of the men in the High Street seemed galvanized into life.

The vicar made for the lane, and had nearly reached it, when he saw Richard Glaire hatless and with his coat half-ripped from his back, rush out, pursued by shout and cry ; and before the vicar and his little band of followers could get up, the young man was surrounded by a knot of men striking at him savagely, one of them hitting up the hand that held a pistol, which exploded, the bullet striking the opposite wall far over the heads of his assailants, and the weapon then fell to the ground.

A storm of furious cries arose, above which was a wild shriek from one of the windows of the big house—a shriek that sent two-fold vigour to the vicar's arms, as he struggled with the crowd that kept him back.

"Quick, Tom ! Maine ! Harry !" he cried. "Now, a rush together," he said, as they forced themselves to his side ; and with all their might they made for the spot, where Richard Glaire seemed to be undergoing the fate of being torn to pieces, for he was now stripped to shirt and trousers, and his face was bleeding ; but, literally at bay, he fought savagely for his life.

The dash made by Mr. Selwood saved him for the time, for though the vicar and his followers, with whom was now the landlord, did not reach the young man, they rent the crowd of assailants so as to make an avenue for him to escape, and he darted off at full speed towards the vicarage.

"My house, Glaire," shouted the vicar, "No, the church," amidst the storm of yells and cries, as he tried to fight his way free.

"After him, lads!" cried the shrill voice of Sim Slee; "and down wi' them as interferes."

"Dal me, if I don't feel the brains of any man as hurts parson," cried the stentorian voice of one of the ring-leaders. "Howd him, boys, and them others too. Give up, parson: it's no good to faight for that blaguard."

"If you are men and not cowards—" shouted the vicar, but his voice was drowned; he was seized by three men who held him good-temperedly enough in spite of his struggles, and with sinking heart he found himself separated from his followers, Big Harry being down with six men sitting on him to quell the mighty heaves he gave to set himself free.

"We wean't hurt thee, parson," said one of the men, who kept him and his fellows prisoners. "See there, lads!"

He went down like a shot, for, by a clever twist learnt in wrestling, the vicar upset him on to the men holding Harry, and then by a mighty effort set himself at liberty, so staggering his captors that Harry got free as well. Then there was a charge, and Tom Podmore was up, and these three ran down the street after the crowd who pursued Richard.

"Harry, my lad! Tom, stick to me," cried the vicar, panting for breath. "I shall never forgive myself or be forgiven if harm comes to that young man," he added to himself; and then dashing on with about as unclerical an aspect as was possible, he rapidly gained on Richard's pursuers, with Tom behind him, and Big Harry lumbering like an elephant at his heels.

Meanwhile the whole town was at the windows or in the streets; children were crying and women shrieking,

while the more prudent tradespeople were busily putting up their "shuts." As for Richard, he had gone off like a hunted hare, doubling here and there to avoid the blow struck at him, and more than once it seemed as if he would escape; but the men had taken their steps well, and knowing that he would make for the station road, there was always a picket ready to cut him off, and drive him back to run the gauntlet afresh.

He had not heard the vicar's words, which were drowned by the savage hoots and yells, mingled with curses upon him, from half-starved women; but, oddly enough, he made straight for the house of the very man whom he hated, and nearly reached it, but was headed back, and fainting and exhausted, he only escaped capture by a clever double, by leaping a hedge across the vicarage garden, and leaping another hedge, landing in the pasture-land leading towards Joe Banks's cottage, the vicarage standing at the apex formed by the roads leading to Ranby and the open land.

This double made a number of his pursuers run round by the road, and gave time to the vicar and his followers to close up to the hunted man.

"Make for the church," cried the vicar, who was close behind now; but his words were unheeded. All he could do was to get nearly behind the young man, determined to turn and face the crowd when they came up; but Richard, maddened with fear, paid no heed to advice; his breath was failing, he tottered, and was ready to fall; the pursuers gained upon them, and at last seeing the harbour, the hunted man dashed through the gate, in at Joe Banks's open door, closely followed by the vicar, Tom, and Big Harry, and then stood at bay in the farthest corner.

"Help, quick! Banks, help!" cried the vicar, hoarsely, and recovering from his astonishment, the foreman picked up the heavy poker, and joined the little rank of defenders, a swing of the iron forming a space which none of those who crowded into the room, and darkened door and window as they thronged the garden, dared to cross.

"Stand back, you cowards!" cried the foreman, flush-

ing with rage, and forgetting his own trouble in the excitement of the moment.

"Gi'e him up! drag him out!" was roared.

"A hundred on you to four!" cried Joe. "Stand back, or I'll brain the first man who comes near."

"We don't want to hurt thee, Joe Banks," cried a voice. "Nor the parson, nor the others; but we wean't go wi'out Richard Glaire."

"Back! every man of you," cried the vicar. "Shame, cowards, shame!"

"Aw raight, parson," cried another. "It's cowardly mebbe, but we mean to hev him aw the same."

"If you hev him, you'll hev to tak' me first," cried Joe Banks, fiercely. "You, Big Harry, hev the legs out o' that deaf Tommy table, and gi'e one apiece to Parson and Tom."

The men tried to stop him, but a swing from Joe's poker sent them back, and the Hercules of the hammer seized the little three-legged table, shattered it in a moment, and armed his companions with the thick heavy cudgels that had formed its supports.

"Now, lads, we're ready for you," said Joe, grimly. "Hit hard at the first as tries to lay a finger on the maister."

There was a groan at this, taken up from without, those in the garden clamouring at those within to drag out Dicky Glaire.

"Down wi' him, lads; down wi' him," cried a high-pitched voice; and Sim Slee, panting with his exertions, partly edged his way and partly was lifted in.

"I'll down wi' thee, thou prating fool!" cried Joe fiercely. "Are ye men, to listen to that maulkin?"

"Yes, they are," cried Sim; "and you're an owd fool to faight."

"Shall we try to drive them out, Banks?" whispered the vicar.

"No good," said Joe, sturdily. "Let's hear what they've gotten to say; it'll give you and the others breath, and mebbe by that time the maister can faight a bit, too. I'm an owd fool, am I?" he said, "eh, Sim Slee?"

"Yes; to faight for the man as has gotten away thee bairn."

"Thou lies, thou chattering jay," cried the old man, furiously; "say it again, and I'll brain thee."

"I do say it again," cried Sim, who was quite out of the foreman's reach. "It's true, aint it, lads?"

"Yes, yes, he's gotten her away."

"It's a lie," cried Joe Banks again. "Tell 'em, Maister Dick; tell the cowards they lie."

"Yes, yes," said Richard, hoarsely, as he stood now leaning against the wall, bathed in perspiration, bleeding, ragged, haggard, and faint. "I have not got her away."

"Thee lies, Dick Glaire," shrieked Sim. "He paid me to get her awaya, and I wouldn't do it."

"It's false," cried Richard again, as he looked round at his fierce pursuers, and then at the doors and windows for a way of escape.

"It's true," cried Sim, exultantly. "It's my turn now, Dick Glaire. Yow'd smite me and coot me feace for not doing thee dirty work, will ta? Now harkye here, lads, at this."

He drew a piece of paper from his pocket, and read aloud:—

"Be ready at nine to-night. She'll join you by the gate of Lamby's close; then straight off with her to the station; take your tickets, as I told you, to London, and stay with her at the address I gave you till I come."

"Now then, Joe Banks," he said, holding out the note, "whose writing's that?"

"It's a lie—a forgery," cried Richard, whose face now was of a sickly green.

Joe Banks passed his hand before his face, and seemed dazed for a moment; then, catching at the note, he took a candle from the drawers on which it stood, and, as he did so, Richard started forward, and made a snatch at the paper, but a menacing movement on the part of the crowd made him start back, while the vicar looked from face to face, and saw Tom Podmore's stern scowl, and the fire gathered in Joe Banks's eyes.

"He'll murder him," he said to himself; and, shifting his position, he got between Joe and Richard Glaire.

"Hold your tongue, for your life," he whispered to the trembling man. "Your only chance is to beg for his mercy: for his child's sake. Daisy must be your wife."

"Curse you!" cried Richard, through his teeth. "You were always against me."

Then he shrank back trembling against the wall, as in the midst of profound silence, the old man read the letter straight through.

"Who gi'e thee this, Sim Slee?" he said twice in a husky voice.

"Dicky Glaire."

"No, no," gasped Richard; "a lie—a lie. It's a forgery. I did not get away Daisy Banks; so help me God, I didn't, Joe."

"D—n thee for a liar!" cried the old man, furiously; and before the vicar could prevent him, he had Richard by the throat, and down upon his knees, faintly protesting his innocence. "It's no forgery. It's thee own false writing same as these," he cried; "your cursed love-letters to my poor bairn."

He tore a bundle of notes from his breast, notes Richard had warned poor Daisy to burn, but which the weak girl had treasured up in secret, to be found in her room when she had gone.

"Look!" he cried, as he held Sim Slee's fatal note of instructions out beside the others; "are these lies and forgeries? Mebbe you think I'll believe thee now, as I've troosted thee throughout. Didn't I think thou wert thy poor owd father's honest son—the gentleman he had tried to mak' thee? Didn't I stand by thee when all ta' town was again thee, fowt for thee, looked on thee as my son, and you turn and sting me like a cowardly snake in the grass?"

"He did, Joe, he did," cried a voice in the crowd, as they stood back now, content to watch for the punishment that should fall on their enemy, while Sim Slee, the man who had betrayed him, smiled like a despicable modern Judas, gloating in the revenge he was taking on the employer who had struck him in the face.

"D—n thee, be silent!" roared Joe, as, with a wild look of fury, he seized the poker as if to strike, and

Richard crouched to the ground and uttered a shriek of dread.

"For God's sake, Banks!" cried the vicar, catching at his arm but unable to stay him. "Man, are you mad?"

"A'most, parson," he said, turning on him. "Thou told me to tak' care; thou gave me fair warning 'bout it all, and like a fool—no, like a man who wouldn't believe it—I turned upon thee when thou wast raight, for I couldn't and wouldn't believe he was such a liar and villain. Look at him, lads; look at the cold-blooded snake, as could stoop to ruin a poor trustin' fool of all he held dear in life, and now all he has to say is a lie."

"I am innocent, Joe, indeed," cried the young man.

"Thou lies," cried Banks, furiously; and he raised his weapon again, but only to dash it into the fireplace. Then, stooping, he caught the shivering man by the throat, dragged him up, and held him against the wall, while not a sound was heard but the panting of breath, and the hoarse mutterings of the stricken father.

"Banks, Banks!" cried the vicar, imploringly.

"Let me be, parson, let me be," he said in a low voice. "Thou'rt a good man, and may trust me." Then, aloud, "Richard Glaire, I'm a poor half-broken workman, and thou'st robbed me."

"No, no," panted Richard. "Mr. Selwood, Harry, Podmore, help!"

"Silence," cried Joe Banks; "we've gotten thee, and thou tries to hide it all by lying. I've gotten thee, though, now, and my eyes are opened to it all. I could strangle thee where thou stands; but I promised thee father I'd stand by thee, and I have again all men, as know'd thee for what thou wast. But I can't do it now, and kill, perhaps, every hope of my poor bairn, so come." He caught the young man tightly by the collar, and waved the others aside, so that they fell back before him as he went out unmolested with his prisoner into the star-lit lane, and stood the centre of the crowd—now at a respectful distance.

"My lads," he said, aloud, while the vicar, who had signed to his companions to be ready, stood with every muscle strained to spring forward and try to save the

shivering man from violence—"My lads, this man's done you all a bad turn, but most of all to me."

There was a murmur of acquiescence at this.

"I've always fowt for ye when I could, but I've always stuck to the maister," continued Joe, in a low, hoarse voice that was terrible in its earnestness.

"You hev, Joe, you hev," was murmured, for the men were impressed by the terrible earnestness of the old foreman.

"I've gotten something to ask of ye, then," said Joe.

"What is it?"

"Let me hev the punishment of this man—this cold-blooded villain."

"Yes, yes," rose like a whirlwind.

"And you'll leave him to me?" said Joe, through his teeth.

"Yes, yes."

"Joe, oh Joe, what are you going to do?" wailed his wife, coming panting up, having returned from the next town by the train by which Richard Glaire had meant to leave.

"Thou shalt see, moother," said Joe, quietly; "I'm going to punish the thief that stole our bairn."

"But, Joe!" cried Mrs. Banks, piteously.

"Howd thee tongue, and see," he cried, sternly. "Richard Glaire, thou'rt a damned villain, but I can't strike down the man my poor bairn has clasped in her poor weak arms. The way's open to thee: go, and God's mercy be held from thee if thou dost not make my poor child amends."

Richard Glaire tried to speak, but his tongue refused its office, and he looked, shivering, from one to the other, as the stern old man stood pointing up towards the town, while the men who, but a short time before, were ready to tear and trample him under foot, stood back right and left, leaving an open lane for him to pass.

"Banks, God bless you!" whispered the vicar, catching the old man's hand.

"And you too, parson," said the other, simply. "Mebbe you'll tak' him home."

The help was needed, for Richard Glaire tottered as his

arm was drawn through the vicar's; and then, followed by Tom Podmore and the big hammer-man, they passed unmolested through the crowd, to find another further on, consisting of the women of the place, who had restrained the frantic mother and Eve Pelly from following; and the latter was kneeling now in the midst of a knot of women beside poor Mrs. Glaire.

"Lift her and carry her home, Harry," said the vicar; and the great fellow raised Mrs. Glaire like a babe. "Podmore, I leave Miss Pelly to you. Somebody ask Mr. Purley to come on to the house at once. Quick. By Jove, he has fainted!"

These latter words were to himself, as Richard Glaire staggered and would have fallen but for the vicar's hold; and lifting him on his own shoulder, he led the strange procession till they entered the house, where he stayed with his two stout companions, John Maine going home, to keep guard with the police, who now arrived after being locked in the station and kept there by the men.

But there was no need, for the eruption was over, and the night's silence was only broken by Richard's moans as he lay there bruised and sore, mad almost against his men and ready to rail at the whole world for the injuries he had received.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A DECEITFUL CALM.

After the storm came a calm, during which there was magisterial talk in the neighbourhood, to which reports of the proceedings had extended, of sending for the military, of having additional police force in the town; and then, as Richard Glaire made no movement, as no property was destroyed, and the injury was confined to one man, the affair began to be looked upon as an ordinary assault.

A good deal of this was due to the fact that trade troubles were not uncommon, and so long as the policemen were not forced into taking action by the magnitude of the offence, they found it better to close their eyes to the proceedings, and not to interfere "till somebody

called murder." In the riot in question the police had been good-humouredly locked up, and kept prisoners, as their captors said, laughing, "so as not to spoil their uniforms;" and, after a show of resistance, when they were informed that the lads were "only going to serve sum'un out," they came to the conclusion that the majesty of the law, as represented by two officials, was no match for a hundred and fifty excited men, and waited patiently till the affair was over.

The clerk of the two made his report, and waited on Richard Glaire, who, being swathed and bandaged, and very sore, told him to go to the devil.

Then the constable asked him if he should get warrants out against anybody—this at Richard Glaire's bedside.

"Yes, if you like," growled Richard.

"Will you give me their names, sir?" said the man.

"How can I give you their names, when I don't know them? It was the whole pack."

"But what am I to do, sir?" said the man, scratching his head.

"Get out!" said Richard. "Wait till I'm better."

The constable saw the vicar downstairs, and tried him for names, but with no better success; and the representative of law and order in the little out-of-the-way town went back in no wise dissatisfied, for any action against so strong a body of men would have been exceedingly unpleasant, and not at all conducive to his future comfort amongst those whom he looked upon as neighbours.

The search, too, for Daisy Banks ceased after the attack on Richard, for on all sides the police were met with the same mocking question, "Hev you asked Dick Glaire where she is?"

In fact, it was now an acknowledged fact that Richard Glaire was answerable for her whereabouts, and no amount of denial had the slightest effect on the people of Dumford.

Jacky Budd shook his head, looked red-nosed, and said nothing, but implied a great deal. In fact, Jacky was in great request, and was asked to take a good deal to drink in the shape of gills of ale by gossips wishful to know how matters went on at the Big House, where

Richard Glaire was at first a prisoner perforce, and later on from choice.

Everybody said that Jacky Budd was as great a "shack" as Sim Slee; but, like that worthy, it was his harvest time, and he was of great importance in the place.

Not that he had much to report, but he dressed up his meagre bits of knowledge, and hinted that the vicar was forbidden the house.

"Young Dicky said he'd shute him if he come on the premises again."

"Why?" said some one.

"Why," replied Jacky, with a wince, "because he's jealous of him; thinks he wants the owd woman."

This report reached the ears of Miss Purley, who immediately put on her bonnet, and went down the street to Miss Primgeon, taking tea with that lady, whom she kissed affectionately for the first time since the vicar's arrival; and Miss Primgeon called her "dear," and kissed her also affectionately, confidences growing to such an extent that Miss Primgeon brought out and showed a pair of braces she had been embroidering for somebody; and, in return, Miss Purley displayed the crown of a smoking-cap in purple velvet, with "a dicky bird" in white beads, sitting on a crimson floss silk twig; and then both ladies called each other "dear" again, and shed tears on the top of the smoking-cap and over the braces, re-embroidering them as it were with pearls, while they talked of the terribly fragile nature of human hopes, the weakness of man, and the artfulness of elderly widows.

The quantity of tea changed by a process of natural chemistry into tears that night was something astounding before the ladies separated.

Sim Slee was in high feather, too, and reached home several nights in a glorified state, spending some little time before retiring to rest in performing strange acts in his stocking feet.

Mrs. Slee always waited up for him on her return from the vicarage, and generally gave him what he termed "a tongue thrashing for nowt."

"Coming home in such a state!" she'd exclaim. "Wher ha' ye been goozening to now? What would the parson say?"

"I don't care nowt for parson or anybody, and what do you mean with your state? I've ony been as far as the corner."

At such times Sim would pull off his boots with some difficulty, for he had the peculiarity of being perfectly sober as far as his waist, while his legs would be in such a disgraceful state of intoxication that he did not reach home without their throwing the upper part of his body several times on the ground. The boots being removed, Sim would sit before the fire talking to himself, and working his toes about in his coarse knitted stockings.

"Why can't you put on your slippers, Sim?" Mrs. Sim would say.

"I wean't," he'd answer. "I'm not going to be ordered about by a woman. I'm a man."

"You're a nasty drunken pig," exclaimed Mrs. Slee.

"What!" he would say, indignantly, "drunk! Heven't had a glass. I never have a bit o' peace o' my life. Tant-tant-tant all day long, driving me away from home. Ugh, you know nowt but nastiness. You always weer nasty. Go to bed."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

SIM SLEE'S PATRIOTISM.

THEN Mrs. Slee would tighten up her lips, look as if she would like to box her lord's ears, and end sometimes by doing it, Sim appealing to "moother" for mercy till she went upstairs, when Sim would get up from the floor, where he had thrown himself, and rub his ears till they ceased tingling, and end by winking to himself and performing the strange movements alluded to in the previous chapter.

At these times, in spite of the very liberal quantity of ale indulged in at his own and other people's expense, Sim's head would be perfectly clear; and knowing, from old experience, that as soon as he had lain down and gone fast asleep, Mrs. Slee would get up and empty his

pockets, he would proceed to conceal his money. Half-crowns were placed up the chimney, a half-sovereign on the ledge over a door, shillings in corners not likely to be swept, under chimney ornaments, and on the tops of picture frames, his great hoard at this time being under an old scrubby geranium, growing—or rather existing, for it had long ceased to grow—in a pot in the window—a favourite plant of Mrs. Slee's, as she had kept it through the winter for years. So matted together were its roots, that if the stem were taken in the hand the whole of the earth came out quite clean in its basket of fibres, and beneath this, in the bottom of the pot, Sim had placed five golden sovereigns, nicely arranged round the hole, on the night after the riot, the geranium being replaced, and all looking as before.

The next morning Mrs. Slee was up a long while the first, as usual, and as was her custom when Sim had been bad over night, she made a tour of the place, finding and gleaning up coins of various value, wondering the while where Sim obtained the money that she transferred to her ample pocket, hidden by drapery and folds at a great depth from the surface.

Just as she was finishing she caught sight of the pot, and saw that it had been removed over night, for the water that had drained into the earthen saucer had, when the pot was moved, dripped on the floor.

A grim smile overspread her countenance as she lifted the pot and saucer together, and looked beneath, to see nothing. Even the pot was lifted from the saucer, and with like result, when, replacing it, the wet pot slipped, and Mrs. Slee caught at the stem of the plant, with the result that she held geranium in one hand, pot in the other, and saw the five glittering gold pieces at the bottom.

She clutched them eagerly, and hid them away, replaced the pot, and then stood thinking.

"Where does he get his money?" she said, looking grimly. "I'll speak to parson."

Mrs. Slee had been gone a couple of hours before Sim descended to partake of the breakfast placed ready for him, all the while battling with his infirmity.

It was one that always troubled him after a night's

excess, for, though Sim's head was clear enough over night when he hid his money, the over-excited brain refused to act next morning, and a thick veil was drawn between the eve and the morrow. There was always the dim recollection of having hidden his money, but that was all; and in this case as in others, pot, door-ledge, pictures, all had passed away from his memory, and there was a blank in answer to his oft-repeated question—

"Where did I put that money?"

It was a blessing in disguise for Sim, though he did not know it. But for this, and his wife's tenacious grasp of all she found, none of which went directly back to Sim, he would have been without a roof to cover his head years before, and many a pound that he accredited himself with having spent in gills of ale and standing treat had really gone into his wife's pocket.

"Well, this wean't do," he said at last; "money's gone, and I shall get no more out o' Dicky Glaire."

"He'll be pretty sick o' his lock-out by this time," said Sim, as he laced his boots. "That was a fine plan wi' them bands. It's kep the strike on, and it's easier than wucking your fingers to the bone. Wonder how long they'll keep it oop. Well, here goes."

He went out, and had not gone far before he met the vicar, who stopped to speak to him; but Sim, to use his own words, "coot him dead," making his way right off through the town, where he stopped for a bit of bombastic "blather," as his associates called it, on the success of their attack on Richard.

"He had the finest leathering he ever had in his life," said Sim.

"And what good's it going to do?" said one of the men, in a grumbling tone.

"What good? Open thee eyes, mun, and see for your sen. Good? It'll bring him to his senses, and he'll come round and ask on his knees for us to go to work, and then we'll mak' our own terms."

"And if he wean't come round," said another, "what then?"

Sim stooped to the man's ear, and whispered something.

"Eh, mun, but we wouldn't do that, would we?"

"Howd thee tongue," said Sim. "Wait and see. I've got a friend coming down to-day as can settle all these things. I'm going to meet him at the station, and he's going to stay here till things is settled."

"And who's going to keep un?" said another man. "I can't keep mysen."

"All on you, o' course," said Sim. "You keep a good heart, lad, and all will be as raight as raight."

"But that would be coming it strange and strong, mun," said the first speaker.

"Strong diseases want strong doses, lad," said Sim, winking. "But don't you wherrit yoursen. There's them in the Brotherhood as is looking after your interests, and we shall all come off wi' flying colours."

"I dessay we shall," said the man, in a discontented tone; "but I want to hear them theer furnaces a-roaring agen, and the firemen's shovels rattling in the coals, and the brass a-chinking in the box o' pay-nights. Dal the strike, I say."

"But it aint a strike now," said Sim, didactically. "Don't you see, it's a lock-out."

"It's all the same," said another, sulkily. "Theer aint no brass to tak', and the missus and the bairns is pined to dead wi' hunger, and starved to dead for want of a bit o' fire."

"But you get the society money," said Sim, indignantly.

"Yah! what's that to a man in full fettle! Just pays for bread, and you can't buy a decent weigh o' meat for fear o' waring it all at once."

"Yes," said another; "it's like club money when a man's sick and can't wuck."

"Raight enew, then," said another; "bud a man wants wuck as well as something to yeat. It's strange, coarse weather for us as far as yeating and drinking goes. Why, my bairns heven't hed a bit of bootther sin' the strike begun."

"A man need be as stiff as a band to stand it all," said another.

"Ay, tough as a bont whong," said another.

"Well, I shall be a very poor creature," said another, "if this here's going to last. I'm 'bout pined to dead now."

"I shall flit and get wuck somewheer else."

"Iver get berry pie for dinner now, Sim Slee?" said another, alluding to a favourite luxury of Sim's, who was accredited with having stolen a neighbour's gooseberries to make the famous berry pie.

Here there was a bit of a laugh, a good sign, for the men seemed ripe for mischief.

"His missus gives him tongue for breakfast ivery morning," said another.

"Sim, come home wi' uz and hev a bit o' custard," said another; and there was a general laugh from the guant-looking men.

"Nice bit o' stuffed chine at my place, Sim," said another; and one after the other, men, whose fare had been bread and potatoes for many days, gave their great orator invitations to partake of the popular delicacies of the place.

"Tellee what," said Big Harry, coming up, "I mean to have somebody's thack off if this game arn't soon over."

"I hadn't going to say much," said Sim, who had been standing with folded arms, looking contemptuously at the crowd around; "but, I say this—if I was to go on as you do I'd hate mysen. Wheer's your paytriotism? Wheer's your risings against tyranny? Wheer's your British wucking man rising like a lion in his might?"

"Yes," said a shrill female voice from a window, "but your British lion wucking man want's his dinner, don't he?"

There was a roar of laughter at this.

"Yah!" said Sim, contemptuously. "Why do I wuck mysen to death for you all, to be badgered for it?"

"I don't know," said the same voice from the window, sounding more shrill than ever, "but I know this, Sim Slee, that my bairns is all pining, while their father's doing nowt but walk about wi' his hands in his pockets, and if things don't soon change, some o' them as got up this strike 'll be put oonder the poomp, and if the men don't do it uz women will."

Sim folded his arms, looked round contemptuously as there rose another shout of laughter, and stalked off to walk to the station and meet the deputation, as he called the man he had invited to come down.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE FOREMAN'S APOLOGY.

THERE was indeed a calm, but to the vicar it seemed a very deceitful one, and he spent many an uneasy hour in thinking whether it was likely when the men grew excited they would attack the house; but he always came back to the conclusion that Richard would be safe there, so long as he did nothing more to exasperate his workmen.

During visits to the house, Mrs. Glaire, with tears, avowed that she could do nothing, only hope, for Richard was stubbornness itself, and when for a moment he thought of inducing Eve to play the part of intercessor, the poor girl's wan and piteous look pained him so that he could not ask her, and it was brought thoroughly home to him that she must love Richard very dearly, though now they were cruelly estranged; and as he sat and gazed upon her, and grew more and more intimate, learning the sweet truth of her nature, and thorough self-denial, he felt half maddened to think she should be thrown away upon such a man, and told himself that he would gladly have seen her wedded to any one to escape so terrible a union.

The past and Daisy Banks were quite ignored. She was a trouble that had come upon the mother and cousin's life, but she was removed apparently from their path, unless some of the letters Richard so regularly wrote were for her.

Murray felt his position in connection with the family acutely. The rumour spread by Budd as to his being forbidden the house was false, but scarcely a day passed when Richard came down, after indulging himself a week in bed to cure ills from which he really did not suffer, but for which stout Mr. Purley doctored him stolidly, and made his sister enter them in the day-book when he

got home—scarcely a day passed without the vicar having to submit to some insult.

He would have stayed away but for Mrs. Glaire, who looked to him for her support in this time of trouble; and he would have avoided Eve's society, dear to him as it was, but for the sweet ingenuous looks with which she greeted him, and laid bare her innocent, truthful heart to his gaze. To her he was dear Mr. Selwood, whose hands she had kissed when he promised her to leave no stone unturned to bring Richard to the path of duty; and her belief in him was, that with his strong mind and knowledge of the world, he would do this, that Richard would be quite reformed; and make her, to her aunt's lasting happiness, a good and loving husband.

And she—does she love him? the vicar often asked himself, and he was compelled to answer, "No!"

For there was no deep passion, only the sorrow for Richard's frailties, the disappointment and bitterness of the young girl, who finds the man to whom she is betrothed is a scoundrel, and fights with self to keep from believing it. No, Eve did not love him with all her heart, for a true love passion had never yet gained an entrance. Richard was to be her husband; that was settled; and some day, when he showed his sorrow and repented, she would forgive him, and become his wife.

And had she the least idea that another loved her?

Not the least. Mr. Selwood was her and her aunt's dear friend, working with them for the same end, and some day in the future, when Richard was forgiven, he would make them man and wife.

This was the state of Eve's heart at the present period of the story; but a change was coming—a look, a word, or a touch, something had thrilled one of the fibres of Eve's being, directly after the saving of Richard from his men; and, though innocent of its meaning, the first germ of a thought which she came afterwards to term "disloyal to Richard," was planted in her heart, and began to grow.

The vicar was at home, busy over his garden. It had been a busy morning, and Mrs. Slee had informed him

that she was "dead bet." And she must have been tired, for fully a hundred people had been for relief that morning, the munificent sums the young vicar devoted to the workmen's families having been of late supplemented by money furnished by Mrs. Glaire.

"Richard must never know," she said; "but I feel bound to do something towards alleviating the distress caused by his obstinacy."

The result was that soup and bread were supplied, and no one came to the vicarage without getting some assistance.

"Thee'll give all thee's got away, and leave nowt for thee sen," said Mrs. Slee to him, crossly, when the distribution was over, and the people gone.

"You're tired," said the vicar, smiling.

"Nay, I'm not," said Mrs. Slee; "but it makes me mad."

"What makes you mad?"

"Why, to see you finding money, and trouble, and me helping you, to keep the poor silly women and bairns from pining, when my maister's doing all he can to keep the men from going to work. It makes me hate my sen."

"Well, but we can't help it, Mrs. Slee."

"No," she retorted; "but half of them don't deserve it."

"If we waited to be charitable till only those who deserved it came, Mrs. Slee, you need not make so much soup, and shins of beef would not be so scarce."

"You're raight theer, sir," said Mrs. Slee, speaking a little less vinegary to the man whom, in spite of her short, snappish ways, she almost worshipped, and would do anything to serve. In fact, Mrs. Slee had, since her instalment as housekeeper to the vicar, grown less angular and pasty of face, even approaching to her old comeliness. Not from idleness, though, for the neat maidservant, who was her assistant, had almost a sinecure for place, Mrs. Slee insisting on making bread, cooking, "rembling" and "siding," as she termed it; in short, she monopolised nearly the whole of the work, and the place was a model of neatness and perfection.

"One's obliged to do the best one can, Mrs. Slee, and be content to leave the working and result to wiser hands."

"Oh yes, sir, that's raight enew; but it makes me mad for all them big owry fellows to be idle 'bout a quarrel, and their missusses looking all poor creatures, and their bairns as wankle as wankle for want o' better food, when there ought to be bacon and pig cheer and ony mander o' thing they want. It's time some on 'em give ower, instead o' leaving their wives scratting about to keep body and soul together."

"I keep hoping matters will mend," said the vicar.

"Here's some un else to wherrit you," said Mrs. Slee, hearing the gate bang. "Why, I never saw such a sight in my life. It's Joe Banks."

The vicar was surprised, and rose as Joe Banks, looking years older, was shown in by Mrs. Slee, who counteracted her longing to know his business by hurriedly going out, making her way into the kitchen, and attacking a pancheon of dough, which had been put to the fire to rise, and was now ready to pour over the side like a dough eruption, and run down and solidify as bread.

This was, however, by the help of flour, soon reduced to normal proportions, banged into tins, and thrust into the oven, Mrs. Slee performing each part of her task as if she were very angry with the compound, and desirous of punishing it for being so good. But it was a way she had, induced by the behaviour of her master, Simeon Slee.

Meanwhile, Joe Banks, in spite of the friendly welcome he had received, refused to sit down, but stood leaning on the stick he carried.

"Nay, parson, nay," he said, "I haven't come to stop. I just thowt I'd act like a man now, and say I asks your pardon, sir, hearty like, and wi' all my heart."

"My pardon for what, Banks?"

"For acting like a fond, foolish owd father the other day, and giving ye the rough side of my tongue, when you came to gi' me good advice."

"Oh, don't talk about that, man, pray."

"Yes, I thowt I would, because I ought to ha' knowd

better, and not been such a blind owd owl. But there you know, parson—and I suppose you're used to it—them as you goes to advise always coots oop rough. So I thowt, as I said, I'd ask your pardon."

"If I've anything to pardon, Banks, it was forgiven the next minute. I look upon life as too short, and the work we have to do as too much, to allow room for nursing up such troubles as that."

"Don't say any more, parson," said Joe, wringing his hand with a grip of iron; "it makes me feel 'shamed like o' my sen."

"I don't see why," said the vicar. "If I had been a father I dare say I should have done the same."

"Down on your knees to-night, parson, and pray as you never may be," cried the old man, fiercely; "that you may never nurse, and bring up, and love a bairn whom you toil for all your life, to find she throws you over for the first face that pleases her."

"But we are not quite certain yet, Banks," said the vicar, laying his hands on the other's arm.

"Yes, I am," said Banks, sturdily. "I know enew to satisfy me; but stop a moment, I meant to have a word about that, and let's have it at once. It's all my own doing, I know, but there it is, and it can't be undone. Tell me, though, parson, can you say from your heart, 'Joe Banks, you're mista'en; I don't think Richard Glaire —Richard Glaire—dal me! I will say it."

The old man's voice turned hoarse, and shook at last, so that he could not speak, as he came to Richard Glaire's name, when, after an effort, he exclaimed as above, and then went on—

"'I don't think Richard Glaire stole away your bairn?'"

There was silence in the room, as the vicar looked sorrowfully in the keen eyes of Daisy's father.

"I say, parson," he repeated, "can you say fro' your heart, 'Joe Banks, you're mista'en; I don't think Richard Glaire stole away your bairn?'"

There was another pause, and Joe Banks spoke again.

"Can you say that, parson?"

"No, Banks," said the vicar, sadly. "I may be mistaken, but I cannot say what you wish."

"Thanky, parson, thanky," said the old man, quietly. "You'll shake hands with me afore I go."

"Indeed I will, Mr. Banks; indeed I will," said the vicar, heartily. "But you are not going yet."

"Yes, I'm going now, parson, and if in the time as is to come you hear owt as isn't good of me, put it down to circumstances. You will, wean't you?"

"You're not going away, Banks?"

"Nay, nay, man, I'm not going away. Just do as I say, that's all."

"How is your wife? I hope better. She seemed ill yesterday."

"Ah, ah, you called yesterday, as she said. Thanky, she's only a poor creature now. This job's unsattled her. Good-bye, parson, good-bye."

"But is there anything I can do for you, Banks?"

"Nay, parson, nowt as I knows on. Good-bye, good-bye."

He shook hands, and went quietly out to the garden, and along the path, leaving the vicar wondering.

"Did he mean anything by his words?" the vicar said, "or was it only in connection with asking me to forgive him? He couldn't mean—oh, no, he's too calm and subdued for that. He's like a man who knows the worst now, and is better able to bear it. I should be glad to see the lock-out at an end, but, even if it were, that poor old man would never go to work for Richard Glaire again."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AT DUMFORD CHURCH.

THE vicar used to look sadly at his church every Sunday, at the damp-stained walls, the unpainted high deal pews, with their straw-plaited cushions and hassocks, dotted with exceptions, where the better-off inhabitants had green baize, and in the case of the doctor's, the lawyer's, and the Big House pews, scarlet moreen cushions.

It was a dreary, damp place, with a few ugly old tablets; and one large monument, which nearly half filled the little chancel with its clumsy wrought-iron railings, enclosing the gilded and painted marble effigies of Roger

de Dumford and Dame Alys, his wife, uncomfortably lying on their backs on a cushion not large enough for them, and turning up the rosetted shoes that they wore in the most ungainly way. Sir Roger was in slashed doublet and puffed breeches, and wore a ruff as stiff as marble could make it, and so did Dame Alys, in long stomacher and farthingale; while their great merits were enumerated, and the number of children they had issue was stated on the tablet on the wall.

This great tomb went pretty close up to the communion-rail, and for generations past the various vicars had hung their surplices on the rails, and changed them for their gowns in the shade, for the vestry was over the porch at the south door, and was only opened for parish meetings, when the officials went in and came out, to adjourn and do business at the big room at the Bull.

Always damp, and smelling of very bad, mouldy cheese, was that church. The school-mistress, a limp, melancholy woman, always used to give it out to the schoolmaster as her opinion that it was the bodies buried beneath the flags—a matter rather open to doubt, as no one had been interred there for over a hundred years, while the damp-engendered mould and fungi in corner and on wall spoke for themselves.

No stove to warm the place in winter; few windows to open in summer, to admit the pleasant warm air; the place was always dank, dark, and ill-smelling, and from its whitewashed beams overhead to its ancient flag flooring, and again from the stained glass windows on either side, all was oppressive, cold, and shudder-engendering.

Let it not be imagined, however, that there were stained glass windows of wondrous dye. Nothing of the kind, for they were merely stained and encrusted by time of a dingy, ghastly, yellowish tint, and as full of waves and blurs as the old-fashioned glass could be.

The consequence was the people were slow to come to church, and quick to get out. One or two vicars had had ideas of improving the place, and had mooted the matter at public and parochial meetings. The result had always been whitewash—whitewash on the ceilings, and whitewash on the walls.

The question had been mooted again.

More whitewash.

Again, and again, and again, as years rolled on.

More whitewash, and whitewash, and whitewash. Even the two old rusty helmets and pairs of gauntlets hung up in the chancel, said to have been worn by great De Dumfords of the past, had been whitewashed, with a most preservative effect, saving where the rust had insisted upon coming through in stains of brown. The result was that, thanks to the churchwardens' belief in lime as representing purity, Dumford was the most whitewashed church in the country, and it stood up in waves and corrugations all over the walls, where the damp had not caused it to peel off in plates, varying in thickness from that of a shilling to half an inch; and these scales had a knack of falling into pews during service time, probably from the piercing character of the music causing vibrations that they could not stand.

That music on Sundays was not cheerful, for there was no organ governed by one will, the minstrelsy being supplied by Owd Billy Stocks, who played dismally upon a clarionet, which wailed sadly for the cracks all down its sides; by Tommy Johnson, the baker, who blew a very curly crooked French horn, which he always seemed to fear would make too much noise, so held it in subjection by keeping his fist thrust up the bell; by Joey South, a little old man in tight leather pantaloons, skimpy long-tailed coat, and tight-squeezy hat, turned close up to the sides at the brims, giving him a tighter appearance altogether than the great umbrella, which, evidently an heirloom, he always carried under his arm, as if it were a stiffened fac-simile of himself, as he walked to church preceded by a boy carrying his instrument—a thing like a thick black gun, with a brass crook about a foot long coming out of one side—Joey South called it his "barsoon," but as he sat cuddling it in church, it looked more like some wonderful Eastern pipe that he was smoking, while it emitted strange sounds like a huge bumble-bee stopped constantly in its discourse by a finger placed over its mouth; by Johnny Buffam, the shoemaker, who blew a large brass affair like a small steam

threshing-engine, and boomed and burred in it like "an owd boozzard clock," as Kitty Stocks said; and lastly, by Trappy Pape, who used to bring a great violoncello in a green baize bag, and saw away solemnly in a pair of round tortoise-shell rimmed spectacles.

These variations of the Christian names of the sacred band were, as before said, common to the town, where every man was a Dicky, or a Tommy, or a Joey, or the like, and generally with an "Owd" before it. The clergyman our vicar succeeded was the Reverend James Bannister, but he was always known as "Owd Jemmy," and it was a matter of regret to the popular wits of the place that the Reverend Murray Selwood's name offered no hold for the ingenious to nickname, so they settled down to "Owd Parson," and so he was called.

But to return to the choir.

They sat in a gallery that crossed the western end of the church, and on Sundays such of them as put in an appearance had it, with the singers and the school-children, all to themselves; and let it not be supposed that the preponderance of bass was noticeable, for it was pretty well drowned by the shrill treble, as the musicians did not get much music out of their instruments, save and excepting Billy Stokes, who always seemed to be dying in agonies, such wails did he send forth in "Portugal," "Hanover," and "Old Hundredth," that it took all the efforts of the basses to smother his piercing cries.

The bells, pulled for a treat by five boys under the direction of Jacky Budd, had had their say; the musicians had blundered and clumped up the dark staircase to their seats, and Trappy Pape was working away with his bow upon a large cake of rosin, while Joey Tight, as he was more generally called, was sucking his brass pipe, and conning over the notes he had known for fifty years, to the great admiration of the schoolboys, one and all longing to "have a blow at that theer big black thing." The "tingtang" which went for ten minutes in a cracked, doleful, sheep-bell style, was being pulled, and the vicar was standing in his surplice, waiting for the clock to strike—which it would do sometimes with tolerable accuracy—and he was thinking of how he should like to

move the people to have something done by way of restoration to the church, when Jacky Budd, with one thumb in his arm-hole, came slinking softly up to try and get a bit of whispered conversation with the parson.

"Strange great congregation this morning, sir," he whispered.

"Indeed, Budd," said the vicar, brightening. "I'm glad of that."

"I counted 'em, sir—there's two-and-forty."

"Forty-two, Budd," said the vicar, with his countenance falling; "and the church holds seven hundred."

"Two-and-forty, sir, wi'out the school-children."

"But you counted the singers, Budd?"

"No, sir, I didn't; two-and-forty wi'out."

"Ah, Budd, it's very sad," said the vicar, sighing. "I hoped for better things by now."

"Why, we never used to hev such congregations in the owd vicar's time, sir, as we do wi' you. We never used to hev more than five-and-twenty o' wet Sundays, and I hev know'd him preach to six."

"Hah!" A long sigh and a mental question, "What can I do to bring them here?" as Jacky Budd shuffled as far as the door and back.

"Owd Robinson from the Bull, and his missus, just come in, sir; and Master Bultitude and Miss Jessie, and John Maine from the farm, makes forty-seven, sir. If I might make so bold, sir, don't you think we ought to hev a collection?"

"Why, that's due next Sunday, Budd, and a strange clergyman coming," said the vicar, hardly able to restrain a smile.

"That's why I said it, sir," said Budd, slily. "You wean't get a score o' people here nex' Sunday."

The vicar shook his head, and looked at his watch, which Jacky took as a hint to go, and he went as far as his desk, opened his book, and then saw something that made him softly shuffle back to where the vicar was waiting for the first stroke of the clock to start for the reading desk.

"They've come to the big pew, sir," he whispered behind his hand.

"What?"

"Mrs. Glaire, sir, and Miss Eve, and young Master Dicky."

The vicar started slightly. This was a change, indeed, and full of promise. Richard Glaire, who had not been out of the house nor into the garden since the attack made upon him, and who had never been seen in the old pew since the vicar's coming, had walked down the High Street between his mother and Eve, and made his appearance at church.

"Well, of course, he would be safe on such a day," thought the vicar, "and the people have been quieter. God grant this is the beginning of the end, and that this little feud may be succeeded by peace."

He thought this as the clock was striking, and he walked to the reading-desk, glanced through the Prayer-Book and Bible, where the markers were, to see that Jacky Budd, whose memory was erratic, had made no mistakes, and given him wrong psalms and lessons to read, and then turned to the opening sentences, and was about to commence; but the presence of Richard Glaire troubled him. He was glad at heart that he should be there, and now that he had come he wished to influence him for good,—to bring him to a different way of thinking, for Eve's sake; and now these sentences all seemed, as of course they were, personal, and such as would make Richard Glaire think that they were selected and aimed specially at him.

"When the wicked man," read the vicar to himself. No. "I acknowledge." No, no, no, one after the other they seemed warnings to the sinner, such a one as Richard Glaire, and in the hurried glance down he came to, "I will arise."

"More pointed still," he thought, and having no time to study the question, he read the two last, beginning, "Enter not into judgment," &c., and "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves," &c.

As the service went on the vicar's eyes took in by turns the members of his congregation, and at last he let them light on the Glaires' pew.

There stood Mrs. Glaire, looking old and careworn; in

another corner, Eve Pelly, with her sweet, innocent face, looking to him angelic in her rapt absorption, as she listened to his words, and there, with his back to them, and leaning over the edge of the pew in a negligent *dégagé* attitude, as if bent on showing the congregation the whiteness of the hands he held up for inspection, stood Richard Glaire, gazing at him with half-closed eyes, in a supercilious, sneering manner.

"Poor boy!" thought Murray Selwood, as his eyes met those of the young man for a moment, and then, like a sudden flash, a thought occurred to the vicar, which made the blood flush to his face, and then seem to run back to his heart.

It was the time for reading the first lesson, and his hand was seeking the book-mark in the Bible.

"Sixth Sunday after Trinity," he thought. "He will think it chosen, and directed at him. What should he do? Change it and read the lesson for that day of the month. No, that would look as if he had purposely avoided it, and it would take some few minutes to find, for his calmness was leaving him, and he could not recall the date. No, he must read it—it was his duty, and it was like a stroke of fate that Richard Glaire should come there upon such a day."

His voice shook slightly, and his eyes dimmed as he read the first words of the beautiful old story, and then, moved to the very core, and in deep rich tones, he read on in the midst of a stillness only broken by the soft chirp of some sparrow on the roof; while Mrs. Glaire's head went lower and lower, Eve Pelly's hand stole softly across to touch her, and the young man sat with his back to the congregation, now white with rage, now burning with shame.

"A coward—a sneak!" he muttered between his ground teeth. "He has chosen that chapter to shame me before all the people. I won't stand it. I'll get up and go out."

But to do that was not in Richard Glaire's power. He had not the strength of mind and daring for so defiant an act, and he sat on, thrilled in every fibre, as the deep, mellow voice went on telling how the Lord sent Nathan unto David, and he told him of the rich man, who in his

wealth spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, but took the poor man's lamb, who was to him as a daughter; and as these words were told, there came from the body of the church the stifled sobs of one of the women of the congregation who could not control her feelings. And at last, in spite of himself, Murray Selwood was moved to such an extent by the words he was reading, that he spoke as if he were the prophet of old, his voice rising and falling as it thrilled his hearers, till it was deep and denunciatory, as he exclaimed:

"And Nathan said unto David—Thou art the man."

There was an audible sigh of relief as the lesson ended, and the vicar wiped the dew from his forehead, for it had been to him a trial, and his voice was low and troubled as he continued the service, but feeling glad at heart that he had not chosen that lesson for the strong, suitable discourse which he afterwards delivered.

It is needless to do more than to refer to it here, even though Joey Tight stood up with his hand to his ear so as not to miss a word, and winked and blinked ecstatically, and though it, too, struck Richard Glaire home, inasmuch as it was in allusion to the trade troubles in the town, and ended with a prayer that the blessings of unity and brotherly love might come among them, and peace and plenty once more reign in their homes.

Old Bultitude and Jessie were waiting at the door as the vicar came out, to look in a troubled way up the High Street, after Richard Glaire and his companions; but there was nothing to fear, the street was deserted, save by the people leaving church.

"He's raight enew to-day, parson," said the old farmer, divining his thought. "Nobody will touch him o' Sunday, and wi' the women. Zoonds, but you gi'e it him hot, and no mistake. That were clever o' ye. Dal it all, parson, I could like to ha' offended you, for the sake of getting such a tongue thrashing."

"My dear Mr. Bultitude," said the vicar, sadly, "if you will look at your Prayer-book, you will find that this was no plan of mine, but a matter of accident, or fate—who can say which?"

"Weer it, though?" said the farmer, as they walked on,

his road lying by the vicarage, and he stared round-eyed at his companion. "Think o' that, Jess! I wouldn't ha' believed it: it's amazing! By the way, parson, I want a few words wi' you. Jess, lass, walk on a bit. Theer, ye needn't hurry. I don't want ye to o'ertake John Maine."

Jessie blushed, and the tears came into her eyes as she went on a few paces; and the farmer, as soon as she was out of ear-shot, pointed at her with his thumb.

"Bit touched, parson, courting like. She's fond o' that lad, John Maine, and I want her to wed young Brough."

"Maine seems to me a very good worthy young fellow," said the vicar.

"Hem!" said the farmer. "I don't know so much about that, and t' other's got the brass."

"Money won't bring happiness, Mr. Bultitude."

"Raight, parson, raight; but it's main useful. Me and my poor missus, as lies there in chutchyard, hedn't nowt when we began; but we made some," he continued, proudly.

"By sheer hard work, no doubt."

"Ay, we hed to work, but that's nowt after all. I wouldn't gi'e a straw for a lad as can't work, and is skeart of it. Why, when I went to the bit o' farm, 'Bootther-boomp' they used to call it then, cause of the 'bootther-boomps.'"

"Let me see, that's your local name for the bittern, is it not?"

"Yes? big brown bird, some'at like a hern," said old Bultitude. "They lives in wet, swampy places. Well, parson, that place was all one swamp when I went, and I says to mysen, where rushes is a growing now, I mean to grow whe-at; and so every year I used to do nowt but spend i' dreaning, and now there isn't a finer farm i' the county."

"It's perfect," said the vicar, "perfect."

"Well, I'm glad to hear thee say it, parson, because I know thee sayst what thee means, and thou'rt as good a judge of a crop and stack as iver I see, for a man as is'nt a farmer. It isn't ivery man as comes fro' the wild parts 'bout London as can tell as a hog or a hogget isn't a pig, but a ship, and knows what he's worth to a shilling or

two. But just hearken to me, going on like that, when I wanted to say a word or two 'bout our John Maine."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, parson. I'm mortal feard that lad's going wrong. He's got some'at on his mind, and he's always in confab wi' young Podmore as was Daisy Banks' sweetheart, and there's some mystery about it. Young Brough says he's mixed up wi' a blackguard low lot, poaching or some'at o' that sort; but I don't tak' much notice o' he, for he's a bit jealous of him. But what I want you to do is to get hold of John and talk to him, for he's upsetting our Jess, and I shall hev to get shoot of him if things don't alter, and I doan't want to do that, parson, for I raythor like the lad, if he'd go back to what he weer. Good-day; you'll see him, will you?"

"Indeed I will."

"And young Podmore, too, parson?"

"Yes, if it's necessary."

"Oh, it is; and you'll put 'em raight, I know. But I say, parson—but that was a hot one for Dicky Glaire. Good-bye."

They parted at the gate, and the vicar went in, just as Sim Slee went by with a man dressed in black—a heavy, white-faced man, with a good deal of black whiskers, who looked as if his clothes did not fit him, and as if he was uncomfortable out of a workman's suit, and could not find a place for his hands, with which, by the aid of a great cotton handkerchief, he kept wiping his face.

"I shouldn't wonder if that's the deputation," said the vicar. "Well, I hope they'll settle the dispute."

Unfortunately, though the vicar's guess was right, the deputation was not a man to further the prospects of peace.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

RICHARD BEGINS TO WOO.

THE vicar's visits to the Big House became fewer, for he could not but see that Richard Glaire, in spite of all that had passed, was more and more embittered against him. He was very quiet, and ceased to be insulting, but

there was a malicious look in his eye, an ill-concealed air of jealousy in his glance whenever the vicar spoke to Eve, that told of his feelings. In fact, Richard vowed that the lesson was chosen because he went to church that day, and if ever opportunity served he would be revenged.

Opportunity was serving him, for, like Mrs. Glaire, he saw but too plainly what the vicar's feelings were towards Eve—feelings that made him grind his teeth whenever they were together, and which finally brought on a fresh quarrel with his mother.

It was one morning when Mrs. Glaire had been appealing to him to reopen the works.

"Not yet," he said. "I should have done it before now if they hadn't been such beastly cowards. I'll give 'em a good lesson this time."

"But you are losing heavily, Richard," said Mrs. Glaire.

"Yes," he said, maliciously. "I like to lose heavily when I can get my money's worth; and I'm punishing them, so I don't care."

"But do you know that if your conduct does not alter you'll lose something for which you will never forgive yourself?"

"What's that?" he said, eagerly.

"Your cousin."

He caught his mother sharply by the wrist, and looked her full in the face.

"You've been plotting for this, mother?"

"Indeed, no, my son."

"Do you want me to marry Eve?"

"You know I do."

"Then why do you encourage that cursed prig of a parson here?"

"Because he has shown himself a good friend to me and mine."

"Bah!" said Richard. "I won't have it. He shall come no more. Look here, mother; you don't believe that I've got Daisy Banks away?"

"No, Richard, I never have believed it," said Mrs. Glaire, meeting his eye, and responding without hesitation.

"Well, look here, then, I tell you what. I'm going to quiet down."

"Dick, my own brave boy," cried Mrs. Glaire, hysterically, as she threw her arms round his neck.

"There, don't be stupid," he said, carelessly repulsing her, after she had kissed him passionately. "I was going to say I'm sick of all this cursed worry, and I shall open the works soon."

"Yes, my dear boy, yes."

"And suppose, to settle all this rumour about Daisy Banks, I marry Eve?"

"My darling boy," sobbed Mrs Glaire; "it is the wish of my life. You make me so happy."

"There, don't, mother; how can I talk to you if you keep pawing me about like that? Look here, you're making my face all wet."

"Yes, yes, my dear boy, it's very foolish, and I'll control myself."

"There, look at them," said Richard, in a low whisper, as he pointed out of the window, to where Eve and the vicar were walking together on the lawn. "Do you see that, mother?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Glaire, uneasily.

"Do you know he's making up to Eve?"

He looked at her searchingly.

"I cannot help thinking that he admires her, Richard; but I am sure Eve thinks of no one but you."

"Then curse him, he shall see me marry her," said Richard, eagerly. "You want it to be, mother, and it shall be—soon. Eve won't mind, and you'll settle it all with her, and then I'm not going to have him here any more."

"Don't talk like that, my boy," said Mrs. Glaire; "but I do think it would be for your happiness if you were married."

As she spoke, the question seemed to be asked her—Was it for Eve's good? and a cold, chilly feeling of misery came over her, as she felt that she was destroying the young life of the girl who had been to her almost more than a daughter.

"That's settled then, is it, mother?" said Richard, lightly.

"Yes, my boy, indeed yes," said Mrs. Glaire, throwing

off her momentary feeling of depression, and telling herself that it was for the best, and that so good a wife would be the saving of her son. Besides, it was for this that she had been working, and now that there was to be the fruition of her hopes, she felt that she must not hang back.

Richard was already out on the lawn, going up to where the vicar and Eve were talking about flowers, and it galled the young man to see the bright happy look pass away as he approached, and not come back.

The vicar spoke pleasantly to Richard, but the replies were monosyllables, and an awkward pause was ended by the coming of Mrs. Glaire, who soon after returned into the house with their visitor, while Richard led his cousin down to the bottom of the garden, and, to her surprise, asked her to sit down.

"Look here, Eve," he said, shortly, "I've been talking to the old lady about our being married."

"Our being married, Richard!" said Eve, turning pale and starting.

"Yes, our being married," he said, sharply. "What are you starting for, you little goose? Any one would think it was something new."

"It came upon me like a surprise," said Eve, catching her breath, and speaking quickly. "I did not expect it."

"Gammon!" said the young man, coarsely. "Why, you've been expecting it for months."

"Indeed no, Richard," she said, eagerly.

"Then you ought to have been," he continued. "You know the old girl wishes it."

"Yes, Richard," she faltered, with her forehead becoming rugged, and her lower lip quivering, "I know that."

"Well, we've talked it over, and she thinks like I do, that if we're married it will settle all this rubbish about Daisy Banks."

"Oh, Richard! Richard!" she cried, pitifully; and she rose to run away, but he caught her wrist, and forced her back into the seat.

"Don't be a little stupid," he said. "Why, that was only a silly flirtation, and I don't care a *sou* for the girl."

"Let me go in, Richard, please," she sobbed.

"Not till I've done," he said, with a half laugh. "Look here, Eve dear; you are not such a little silly as to think that I know where Daisy is, or that I took her away?"

"Tell me, on your word of honour, Richard, that you don't know where she is," said Eve, simply, "and I shall believe you."

"'Pon my word of honour, I don't know where she is; and I didn't take her away; and I didn't send her away; and I don't care a fig where she is, and if I never see her again."

"Richard!"

"There now, are you satisfied?" he cried.

"I believe you, Richard," she said, ceasing to resist, but sitting back in the garden seat, and looking dreamily away.

"That's all right, then," he said. "Well, then, now we can talk about when the wedding is to be."

"No, no, Richard; not now, not now!" she cried, piteously, as she strove once more to get away.

"But we will, though," said the young man, flushing at her resistance. "It's all been settled long enough that you were to be my wife, so let's have none of your 'not nows,' miss."

"Let me go into the house, please, Richard," said Eve, coldly.

"Yes, my dear, when we've settled the wedding-day," said Richard.

"We cannot settle that now, Richard," said Eve.

"And why not, pray?"

"Because," she said, with her heart beating and her voice faltering, "I cannot forget, for certainly a year or two, that which has taken place during the past few weeks."

"What?" he shouted.

"I think you understand me, Richard," said the girl, quietly, making no effort now to free the wrist he so tightly held.

"Yes," he said, flushing with passion, "I do understand. You wish to throw me over because you have been angling for and catching that cursed intriguing parson."

"Richard!" cried Eve, turning red and stamping her foot upon the ground, "I will not stop and listen to such language."

"And in a passion, too," he said, mockingly, "because her favourite is spoken of; but it won't do, madam. You're promised to me, and I wish the wedding to take place as soon as it can. Don't you think I'm going to let that beggarly meddling priest come between us."

"This is as cowardly as it is unjustifiable, Richard," exclaimed Eve.

"Is it?" he retorted, "Don't you think I'm blind. I've seen your soft looks at him; and, curse him, if he comes here again I'll strangle him — an insidious crafty Jesuit. But don't you think me such a child as to believe I'm to be treated like this."

"You are hurting my wrist, Richard," said Eve, coldly, and speaking firmly now, for as her cousin began to bluster she grew calm.

"Hang your wrist," he said, angrily, "my hands are not so tender as the parson's, I suppose."

"Richard," she said, with her voice trembling as she spoke, "Mr. Selwood has always been to me as a gentlemanly, very kind friend, and to you the best of friends."

"D——n his friendship!" said Richard, looking ugly in his wrath. "He's my enemy, and always has been, and he's trying to win you away. Ah! I know what it means: I'm to be thrown over, and you take up with him."

"Richard, this is as coarse as it is cruel and unjust," cried Eve, now regularly roused; "and I will not submit to it. Mr. Selwood is nothing to me but a friend."

"Indeed," said Richard, with a sneer, "then pray what may this great change mean?"

"Mean!" she cried, scornfully; and Richard's eyes lit up, for he thought he had never seen her look so attractive before, "it means that you have cruelly outraged my feelings by your wickedness and deceit."

"My deceit!" he cried.

"Yes," she said, with contempt: "have you forgotten what I saw that evening in Ranby wood? Have you forgotten the past year's neglect and contemptuous indifference to all my affection? Shame on you, Richard;

shame! You ask me to be your wife, and tell me I am promised to you. I am; but you have broken the ties, and if I could forgive you, it must be years hence, when I have learned the truth of your sorrow for what is past."

Before he could recover from his surprise, she had snatched away her hand to run, frightened and sobbing, to her own room, where she threw herself upon her knees to weep and bewail her wickedness, for she was beginning to feel that there was some truth in her cousin's words, and that she had committed a sin, for whose enormity there could be no pardon.

"What is to become of me!" she wailed in her misery, as she went to her dressing-table, and started back in affright at her hot, flushed face. "Oh, is it true that I have behaved as he says, and can Mr. Selwood have seen my boldness?"

She sank into a chair to cover her face with her hands, but only to start and utter a faint cry as she felt them drawn away, and saw that Mrs. Glaire was looking eagerly down upon her flushed and fevered cheeks.

CHAPTER XL.

SIM SLEE'S BROTHERHOOD.

MANY of Richard Glaire's workmen belonged to one of the regular trades' unions, from which they received counsel and assistance, and these men held Sim Slee's movements in the most utter contempt. For his part, the above-named worthy returned the contempt, looking down upon trades' unions as not being of sufficiently advanced notions for him, and praising up his own brotherhood to all who were weak enough to listen.

The brotherhood, as he called it, was entirely his own invention, as far as Dumford was concerned; but it was really based upon an absurd institution that had place in London, and maintained a weak and sickly growth, being wanting in all the good qualities of the regular unions, and embracing every one of their faults.

But it pleased Sim Slee, who went upon the motto *Aut Cæsar aut nullus.* In his own brotherhood he was chief, chairman, father, or patriarch. In the regular trades'

union he would have been only Sim Slee, an individual largely held in contempt.

It was a great night at the Bull and Cucumber, for the brotherhood was to hold a secret meeting on the subject of the lock-out. Robinson, the landlord, took a great interest in the proceedings, and wanted to see all; but Sim Slee and one or two more leaders of the secret society condescended only to allow the inquiring mind to see to the arrangement of the tables and forms; and then, as the brotherhood assembled in secret conclave, they were ushered in with great ceremony, and every man seemed to be impressed with the solemnity.

In fact, the room was lit up for the occasion, curtains were tacked over the two windows, and flags were arranged on the walls, each flag bearing a device in tinsel. On one were the words :—

"The Horny Hand is the Nation's Need."

On another :—

"Labour Conquers All."

While over the president's chair, or, as Sim had christened himself, "the Grand Brother," was a roughly-drawn representation of the familiar skull and cross bones.

On the table were two stage swords, drawn from their sheaths, and laid crosswise; and at the door were a couple of sentries, over the said door being tacked the motto—"Free and Equal."

It was a great night, and every man of Sim's partisans looked solemn, but mugs of ale and long clay pipes were not excluded from the two tables, at which sat about a dozen men, as many more standing where they could find room.

There was a ridiculous aspect to the affair, but mingled with it was a grim look of determination, and many a stern face there wore an aspect that Richard Glaire would not have cared to see, even though he might have scoffed at the meeting, and called the men fools and idiots.

Sim Slee was the great gun of the evening, and he wore his plaid vest very much open, to display a clean shirt, at the edge of whose front fold it was observable that Mrs. Slee's "scithers" had been at work, to take

off what she termed the "dwiny" ends; but the buttons refused to remain on terms of intimacy with their holes, with the consequence that the front gaped widely.

But Sim Slee was too important and excited to notice this, for he was busy over a book before him, and papers, and constantly in communication with the tall, heavy-looking man in black, Mr. Silas Barker, the deputation from London, who was to help the brotherhood through their difficulties, and who had promised to coach and assist Sim in the great speech he was to make that evening.

At last all seemed about settled, and Sim rose to tap the table with a small wooden hammer, when he sat down again suddenly, for three loud knocks were heard at the door.

"Who knocks without?" said the first sentry.

"Brotherly love," said a voice without.

"What does it bring?" said the second sentry.

"Ruin and death," was the reply.

"Enter ruin and death," said the first sentry; the door was opened, two men entered, Sim Slee looked solemn, and everybody seemed very much impressed.

The door being closed, and silence procured, Sim Slee rose, and there was a great deal of tapping on the table, to which Sim bowed, frowned, and thrust one hand into his vest. At least he meant so to do, but it went inside the gaping shirt.

"Brother paytriots and sitterzens," he commenced, "I think as we are all assembled here."

Just then a knocking was heard without.

"Ah, theer's some 'un else," said Sim, and he sat down, while the sentries repeated their formula; the voices outside replied in due order, with the requisite pass-words, and three more entered to swell the little crowd. Sim then rose again, more important than ever.

"Now, then, brother sitterzens," he began, "as I believe all the paytriots are here, we will now *pro*-ceed to business."

"Howd hard a minnit," said Big Harry, who occupied a central position, "I want another gill o' ale."

Sim hammered the table with his little mallet, and exclaimed, angrily,

"You can't hev it now: don't you see the brotherhood is setting?"

"Arf on 'em's a stanning," said Big Harry, with a grin; "and if you're goin' to hev all this dry wuck, I must wet it."

"Hee-ar! hee-ar!" shouted two or three voices.

"But don't yow see as the brotherhood is a setting?" cried Sim. "The door is closed now, and we're in secret conclave."

"I don't keer nowt about no secret concave," growled Big Harry. "A mun hev another gill o' ale."

"Let's hev some more drink, then," cried several voices.

"Yow can't, I tell you," cried Sim. "We're a setting wi' closed doors."

"Open 'em, then," said Harry, "or I will. Here, summun, a gill o' ale."

"And I wants some 'bacco," said another voice.

Sim hammered away at the board for a bit, when Harry exclaimed, leaning his great arms on the table, and grinning,

"Say, lads, I niver see owd Simmy handle a hammer like that up at th' wucks."

"Silence!" roared Sim, in the midst of a hearty laugh from the men. "Fellow paytriots and sitterzens, as Grand Brother of this order, I say———eh, what?"

Sim leaned down to the deputation, who had pulled his sleeve.

"Better let them have in the drink," whispered Mr. Barker, it makes 'em more trackable."

"All raight," said Sim, in an ill-used tone. "Here, send out for what's wanted, you two at the door, for no one isn't to enter."

There was a bustle at the door after this, and various orders were shouted down-stairs, and eagerly responded to by the landlord, who wanted to bring all in, but was stayed by the sentries.

"Here, I say, said Sim to Mr. Barker, "I shall lose all that speech 'fore I begin, if I have to wait much longer."

"I'll prompt you," said Barker.

"Eh?" said Sim.

"I'll prompt you—help you."

"Oh, all right; thankey. Kiver up them motters till the door's shoot close," he continued aloud; but as the door was on the point of being closed, Sim's order was not obeyed; and the ale and tobacco being handed to those who demanded them, Sim once more rose to begin, but only for a fresh clamour to arise from another party, whose "moogs" were empty, and while these were being filled, the swords were covered with a coat, and the mottoes turned to the wall.

At length all were satisfied, and Sim Slee rose for the speech of the evening.

"Brother workmen, mates, paytriots, and fellow sitterzens o' Doomford"——

"He—ar, he—ar!"

"We are met here to-night, honoured by the presence o' Brother Silas Barker."

"He—ar, he—ar," and a "hooray."

"And Brother Silas Barker is delicate from the payrent lodge o' Brothers in London."

"Drink along o' me, mate," growled Big Harry, holding out his mug to the deputation, "that'll keep you from being delicate."

"You Harry," cried Sim, "don't interrupt. You ain't one of our most trustworthy brothers. You've fote on the wrong side afore now."

"I'll faight yow for a gill o' ale any day, Simmy Slee," said Harry, winking solemnly across the table at a mate.

"Don't you int'rupt the meeting wi' ignorant remarks," said Sim, taking no notice of the challenge. "I said delicate fro' the—fro' the—"

"Payrent society," said Mr. Barker, prompting.

"All raight, I know," said Sim, pettishly; "fro' payrent society. Came down to Doomford to tell us suff'ring wuckmen as the eyes o' the Bri'sh wucking man i' London and all the world is upon us."

There was vociferous cheering at this, during which Big Harry confidentially informed his mate across the table, that he'd "Tak' Sim Slee wi' one hand tied behind him, and t'other chap too, one down and t'other come on."

"We're met together here, mates—met together," con-

tinued Sim, whose flow of oratory had not yet begun, but who was gradually warming—"met together, mates, to bring things to a big crisis, and let the thunder of the power of the sons of labour—"

"Here, let's hev in some more ale," shouted some one at the other end.

"Why can't yow be quite? interrupting that how," cried Sim, remonstrating. "Yow can't hev no more ale till the debate's ended. Do you want to hev the mummy—mummy—"

"Course we don't," said Big Harry, aloud. "But who's him?"

"I say," cried Sim, angrily, "do you want to have the mummy—mummy"—then, angrily, to Barker, "Why don't you tell a fellow?"

"Myrmidons—myrmidons of"—whispered Barker.

"All raight, all raight," said Sim, impatiently, "I know—mummy—mummidons of a brutal holygarchy down upon us?"

"And hale us off," whispered Barker, for Sim had evidently forgotten his speech.

"Yes, yes, I know," whispered Sim. Then aloud, "And hale us off——"

"Hear, hear!" roared Harry, hammering his empty mug on the table; "raight, lad, raight. Here, some un, tell the mummy to bring the ale."

"Sit down, Harry," shouted Sim. "I say hale us off to fresh chains and slavery. I say, mates," cried Sim, now growing excited, and waving his hands about, "as the holygarchy of a brutal mummidom."

"No, no," whispered Barker, behind his hand, "myrmidons of a brutal oligarchy."

"Yes, yes, I know," cried Sim; "but they don't. It's all the same to them. Yes, mates, a brutal mummidom, and a holygartchy, and as I was a saying, our fellow sittyzens in London have been a wackin o' 'em oop. They've gone arm in arm, in their horny-handed strength, like brave sons of tyle, with gentlemen playing their bands o' music."

"Hear, hear!"

"And colours flying"—

"Hear, hear!" and a great deal of mug rattling on the table.

"And made Pall Mall—Pall Mall—Pall Mall"—

"Hear, hear!"

"Go on," whispered Barker, "that's it—echo to their warlike tread."

"Echo to the warlike tread o' their heavy boots," cried Sim, banging his hand down upon the table.

"Hear, hear!"

"Till the bloated holygarchs a sitting in theer bloated palluses abloating theer sens——"

"Brayvo, lad," shouted Big Harry; "that's faine."

"Set down and shouthered wi' fear," continued Sim; "as they—as they—do be a bit sharper," he whispered to Barker.

"Saw the nation rising in its might," whispered the prompter.

"Saw the nation rising up wi' all its might and main," cried Sim. Then to Barker, "Shall I put it into 'em now?"

"Yes, yes; they're ripe enough," was the answer.

"And now, mates," continued Sim, "it's time as we rose up in our might, and showed him as is starving our wives and bairns what we can do when we're trampled down, and that like the wums as is tread on, we can turn and sting the heel o' the oppressors."

"Good, good! Go on," said the deputation, rubbing its hands.

"Are we to see a maulkin like Dicky Glaire, because he is an employer, always getting fat on the sweat of a pore man's brow?"

"Go on! go on! Capital!" whispered Barker. "Fine himage."

"What's a himage?" said Sim, stopped in his flow.

"All right, go on, man," whispered Barker; "I only said fine himage."

"As my friend and brother the deppitation says," continued Sim, "Dicky Glaire's a fine image to sit on all us like an old man o' the mountains."

"No, no, I didn't," whispered Barker.

"You did," whispered Sim. "I heerd you."

"Go on," whispered Barker; "the time has come—go on; beautiful."

"And the time has come to go on beautiful," said Sim, waving his arms.

"No, no," whispered Barker.

"I wish you'd howd thee tongue altogether," whispered Sim. "You do nowt but put me out."

"Go on, brayvo!" cried the men.

"Now, don't you interupt me no more," whispered Sim, in an aggrieved tone; "that aint a bit like as you writ it down, and I shall say it my own way-er. And, mates," he continued aloud, "the time has come when we've got to tak' our heads from under the despot's heels, when we've got to show 'em 'ow they depends upon the sons of tyle; and teach 'em as all men's ekal, made o'the same flesh and blood, eddication or no eddication; and if Dicky Glaire won't gi'e uz a fair day's wuck for a fair day's pay——"

"No, no, other way on," whispered the deputation.

"You let me alone; I'm getting on better wi'out you," whispered Sim. Then aloud, "They'll have to change places wi' us, and see how they like it then. Now, who's that?" cried Sim, as a loud knocking was heard. "A man can't get a word in edgeways."

"Who knocks wi'out?" cried the first sentry.

"Open the door," said a loud voice.

"Who knocks wi'out?" said the sentry again.

"Open the door, fool!" said the rough voice again.

"Give the pass-word," said the sentry.

"Open the door before I kick it down," cried the voice.

"Look out, lads," cried Sim, excitedly, as he left the chair. "It's the police. Tak' down them flags, and shove the swords out o' sight. It's the police."

There was a rush, and the flags were hurriedly pulled down and folded up, while the swords were placed under the table.

"Open this door," cried the same loud voice, and a heavy fist was applied to the panel.

"You can't come in, I tell you," cried one of the sentries, angrily. "This room's private."

"You'd better tell them to open the door," said the

deputation. "They can't touch you; we're within the law. It's a society meeting. Take your seat."

"Open the door, then," said Sim, reluctantly resuming his place, when, as the door was thrown back, in came Joe Banks, closely followed by Tom Podmore.

"Hooray, lads!" cried Sim, enthusiastically. "I always said as he would. It's Joe Banks come to join us at last, along wi' Podmore."

CHAPTER XLI.

TO SAVE RICHARD.

"Eve, my child," said Mrs. Glaire, "what is it? Tell me what this means."

"Oh, aunt, aunt!" the poor girl sobbed. "Richard—Richard."

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Glaire, drawing her to her breast, and laying her cool soft hands upon the burning brow; "tell me, darling. You have no secrets from me."

"I will—directly—aunt," sobbed Eve; and then, in a burst of passionate grief, "He has been begging me to be his wife."

"And is that so very dreadful, my child?" said Mrs. Glaire.

"And when I told him it could not be perhaps for years—not till I could freely forgive him—he accused me, so dreadfully."

"Indeed, child! what did he say?"

"Oh, I could not, cannot tell you," sobbed Eve.

"Yes, yes, my poor little frightened bird," said Mrs. Glaire, caressing her, "you can tell me all."

"I will, aunt," said the girl, starting up, looking flushed and eager, as she hastily dried her eyes, and speaking now indignantly; "he accused me, aunt, of encouraging Mr. Selwood."

"And have you, Eve?"

"Oh, aunt dear, never, never!" This with a wondering, almost angry, look.

"And has Mr. Selwood ever made any advances to you, my dear?" said Mrs. Glaire, watching curiously the bright blushing face before her.

"Never, aunt dear, never. He has always been so kind and gentlemanly. Never by word or by look, aunt."

"No, child, he would not," said Mrs. Glaire, slowly; "he is a gentleman whom we can trust and love."

"Love, aunt?"

"Yes, child, as a very dear friend. But about Richard, Eve. He was very hot and passionate?"

"Yes, aunt. Most cruel to me."

"And you told him you could not forgive him for his cruel neglect and trifling with—with that poor girl?"

"Yes, aunt," said Eve, struggling hard to keep up her firmness; "but not quite all you say. I did not tell him I would not forgive him."

"What then, my child?"

"That I could not forgive him yet, not till I saw that he was truly sorry for the past."

"You told him this, Eve?"

"Yes, aunt dear. Was it wrong?"

"Wrong, my child," said Mrs. Glaire, embracing her, as the tears started to her eyes. "No; it was most maidenly and true. But, Eve, my child, some day you may be a mother—some day you may have a son, over whose welfare your heart will yearn, and for whom you would be ready to do anything—even to committing a crime to save him from a downward course."

"Aunt!" cried the girl, looking up at her wonderingly, for she was speaking now in eager excited tones.

"Yes, child; ready to screen him, forgive him, bear the penalty of his sins, anything to save him from pain, suffering, or the retribution he has been calling down upon his head."

"Oh, aunt," cried the girl, in awe-stricken tones, "is it like this to be a mother?"

"No, no, my child: all sons are not like this. But it is a mother's agony to feel that if her boy turns from the straightforward course, she may herself be perhaps to blame; that by indulgent weakness, by giving up the reins of government too soon, she may have caused him to go astray; and—Eve—Eve—my darling, this is my fate, and it is you alone who can save my boy!"

"Aunt!"

"Yes, child. He is my boy, my very own, and I have been weak, and let the weeds grow up in him, to the choking of the good qualities he possesses. I have been too proud of him, too glad to see my son taking his position as a gentleman, and a man of the world. It was my proud desire to see him the leading man here at the works—the great man of the town; and my pride has brought its punishment—has ruined my boy, so that he needs all I can do to save him."

"Aunt—dear aunt—pray—pray don't kneel to me!" cried Eve, excitedly, as she saw her aunt's next act.

"Yes, yes, child, I must—I must; for it is to you I look alone for help, as God's minister, to save my boy. I—I have sinned for him more deeply than I can tell—more than a life of repentance can wash out, bringing, as I have, misery upon others, and fresh ill-treatment of my boy; but you—you—Eve, can save him. We must forgive—you must forgive; for it is I who am to blame."

"No, no, aunt!"

"Yes, my child," cried Mrs. Glaire, clinging to her passionately. "Nothing but the earnest love of a pure, true woman, can save him—the woman who will be his faithful wife, and bless him with her love. Eve, my child, on my knees I ask you to forgive him, now—at once, even as you nightly pray our Father to forgive us our trespasses. Say you will forgive him, that you will blot out all the past, and be his wife; for it will be the turning-point of his life."

"Aunt, dear aunt," sobbed the poor girl, bewildered by the strange outburst of passion from one generally so calm and placid in her ways. "What can I say? Oh, this is terrible!"

"Terrible, Eve? No, no, child, not terrible to save him we love, for you do love him, Eve?"

"I—I—hope so, aunt."

"Yes, yes, you do. You must, for he is true and good at heart. You will forgive him—for my sake, Eve. Eve, I am on my knees to you. If you have one spark of gratitude for the past, listen to my prayer!"

"Aunt, dearest aunt, my more than mother!" sobbed

Eve, completely carried away by the agony of one who had been everything to her for years and years of her life; "I will do all you wish. I am your child. Tell me what to do, and I will do it; for I love you, dearest aunt, as if you were my own mother."

"I knew it, I knew it, my darling, my own darling!" cried Mrs. Glaire, throwing her hands upwards. "Saved, saved! Oh, God! oh, God! Thou hast heard my prayer!"

Eve shrank from her for an instant, frightened at her wild appeal, but only for the moment; the next she had thrown herself on her knees beside her, and the two women were sobbing and caressing each other tenderly, till the calm came after their storm of weeping, and Eve prevailed upon the trembling mother to lie down upon her bed, where exhausted nature at last prevailed, and she sank to sleep. But only to mutter strangely of "Daisy Banks—poor Daisy Banks," and utter at times the most piteous sighs; while, as Eve watched her, the memory of that which she had promised came upon her with all its force, and a feeling of depression and of utter misery stole over her, so great that she could hardly bear to sit alone.

She had promised to be Richard's wife—promised again, and that it should be soon; promised to save him, when that strange and wondrous joy, that glorious light of love that was springing up in her breast, frightening her by its intensity, was ever expanding, but must now be crushed out—for ever.

What was she to do? To save Richard—to be his wife. Not so hard a task a few months since, but now! Oh, it was dreadful! And yet that was a traitorous feeling that she must crush; and at last, sobbing bitterly, Eve Pelly knelt by her sleeping aunt, and prayed earnestly as woman ever prayed before, that Murray Selwood might never care for her, and that she might be a good and tender wife to the man who sat at the bottom of the garden, smoking a cigar, and uttering a few oaths from time to time against the woman on her knees. What time he also defiled the flowers around the rustic seat, and cut them with his stick, till he started to his feet in an agony of dread, for a shadow fell across him as some

one approached noiselessly over the velvet lawn, and looking up, there stood the foreman, gazing full in his face, as he exclaimed—

"Richard Glaire, I've come to have a few words wi' you."

CHAPTER XLII.

A NEW BROTHER.

JOE BANKS stood staring round the room defiantly, while the sentries kept the door ajar.

"Shoot the door, fools," he said, sharply; and then, as it was closed, he turned on Barker, who, rising, said smoothly,

"May I ask what our friend, Mr. Joseph Banks, wants here at a private meeting?"

"Let me tackle him, mate," said Sim. "Here's a cheer here, Maister Banks; come an' sit along-side me. Yow've come to join uz then, at last?"

"Yes," said Banks, shortly, as he beckoned Tom Podmore to his side.

"I always said he would, lads," cried Sim. "I always said it. He's seen the error of his ways, and come to join the brotherhood, and clasp the honest horny hand o' labour. He's a paytriot at heart, is Maister Banks, and I knew as he'd come at last."

"But," said Barker, "our friend is not yet one of the brotherhood."

"What?" said Banks, sharply.

"Our friend has not yet taken the oaths," said Barker.

"Oaths—Brotherhood"—cried Banks. "Don't I tell you I join you? What more do you want?"

"You leave Joe Banks to me, lads, and I'll explain," said Sim, confidentially. "You see, Joe Banks, we binds and ties oursens together wi' oaths like in a holy bond, and sweers brotherly love. Don't you see?"

"Yes, you must be sworn in, Mr. Banks, it's the rule."

"Swear me in, then," said Banks, contemptuously.

Several of the men then advanced, and Banks and Podmore were seized, while Slee began to place a folded handkerchief across the former's eyes.

"What do you me-an by this mummery?" exclaimed the foreman; and he tried to drag away the handkerchief, but was stopped.

"This is part of the formula for the administration of the oath," said Barker. "Kneel down. Now bring forward the swords."

Two of the men came forward with the swords, which had been extracted from their hiding-place, and as Joe Banks was half forced into a kneeling position, they were held crossed over his head.

"Silence!" exclaimed Barker. "Now, you swear."

"Curse your childish folly!" cried Banks, starting up, tearing the bandage from his eyes, and sending the cross-swordsmen flying. "Ye're worse than a set o' bairns in their play-a."

"Haw—haw—haw!" laughed Big Harry. "I niver see such a siaght in my liafe."

"I'll swear to be faithful brother to you," exclaimed Banks, "and to fight with you against all our enemies."

"That'll do; that'll do," exclaimed several voices. "We know Joe Banks always does what he says; he'll do."

"But that wean't do," said Sim. "It aint the oath, you know, Joe Banks, and you must tak' it."

"I'll take no other," cried Banks, shortly. "Wheer's Tom Podmore?"

Tom was brought forward, bandaged, while Slee and Barker whispered together; and the majority of the men seemed to look upon the scene as one to be held in great veneration.

"Sweer in Tom Podmore," cried Slee; and the men with the swords were once more about to perform their theatrical act with the most solemn of faces.

"Stop!" cried Banks, snatching off the bandage. "That's enew o this stuff. I'll answer for Tom Podmore. Let's hev deeds, not words."

"I'll go on to explain," said Sim, snatching at the chance for a speech. "I was speaking when you came in, Joe Banks."

"I think you come into the world speaking," cried Joe Banks, roughly. "Get down off that cheer, and say your say like a man."

"This sort of interruption is not parliamentary," cried Sim. "It isn't, is it?"

The gentleman from town shook his head.

"Theer," cried Sim, the "deppitation says as it isn't?"

"Look here, men," cried Joe Banks, speaking excitedly, "I come here to-night to join you. You wanted me wi' you before, but I wouldn't come, because I was in the cause o' raight. I wouldn't gi'e up my position as a straightforward man for to faight for a few beggarly shillings a week."

There were some murmurs of discontent here, but the foreman did not seem to hear them, and went on.

"The side of raight is the side of raight no longer, and I'm wi' you, for I'll work no more for one who has done me as great a wrong as he can do."

"He hev, Joe Banks, he hev, and we'll let him know it," cried several.

"No, no," cried Banks; "no more attacks on him; "we've had enew o' that. Strike him through his pocket; let him feel it where we've felt it; but mind this, the lad as raises hand again the house where them two women are, raises it again me."

Amidst the loud cheering that followed, Sim Slee, who would not be repressed, climbed upon the table in front off his chair, shouting—

"He's roused at last, lads. He's a-takking the iron foot of the despot from his brow, and come to straike for freedom."

There was a loud cheer at this, and Sim's vanity was gratified.

"Now," cried Banks, "what are you going to do? You've got some plans?"

"Theer," cried Sim; "what did I tell you? Didn't I say as he'd come to uz? Yes, Joe Banks, our new brother, we're going to set the eyes of all England starting out of its head, to see us strike for our raights. We're a-going to——Hey?"

"Stop!" whispered Barker. "See to the doors there. We've a man present as isn't sworn. He must take the oath."

"Didn't I say," cried Joe Banks, fiercely, "that I'd be answerable for him?"

"But I'm not going to join their plans, Joe Banks," said Tom, in a low voice.

"Raight," said Banks, shortly. "Go on, Sim Slee."

"Then look here, mates. Here's what we're a-going to do. Bring that theer keg."

Two men dragged a keg from a cupboard, and placed it on the table.

"Them as is smoking is to go to the other end of the room," said Sim, and there was a sudden movement amongst the men, the deputation not being the last. "Now then," said Sim "who's got a knife?"

Joe Banks took a big clasp-knife from his pocket, and threw it upon the table, Sim picking it up, and beginning to open it as he went on talking.

"Here's my plan. We're agoing to open the eyes o' lots of places as thowt they was very big in their way; and —Hello, where didst thou get this knife fro', Joe Banks? —it's mine."

"Then it was thou as coot the bands!" cried Joe, seizing him by the throat. "Thou cunning fox, thou'st trapped after all. It's thou as browt all this trouble on uz wi' thy coward's trick. It was thou as clomb into wucks through the window, and coot all the bands, and left thee knife behind to bear witness again thee. Look at him, lads; he canno say it wean't."

"And he don't want to," cried Sim, shaking himself free. "I did it all by my sen as a punishment to a bad maister as knows nowt but nastiness; and now we're a-going to come down o' him wi' tenfold violence. Bands is nowt to what we're a-going to do."

There was a cheer at this, and the men who were beginning to be wroth against Sim and his companion, and would have severely punished him a short time back, lost all thought of the dastardly escapade in the savage attack they meant to make.

"Look here, Joe Banks," continued Sim, whose words came freely enough now without the aid of the deputation, "we're a-going to do something as shall let 'em see what your honest British workman can do, when he's been

trampled down, and rises up in his horny-handed majesty to show as he's a man, and to teach all the masters off England to treat their men as if they were Christians—like brothers as helps 'em to bloat and fatten on the corn and wine, and oil olive and unny as the horny handed hand pro——"

"Curse your long-winded speeches!" cried the foreman, savagely, "are you going to talk for ever?"

"Don't be excited, my friend," said Barker, smoothly.

"We're agoing to startle the whole world," cried Sim, not heeding the interruption, as he stood now with one foot upon the keg; "startle the whole world with the report, and the savour shall go up to make the British workman free. Mates, lads, and fellow-workers, we're going to——"

"That's powther, I suppose?" said Banks, pointing to the keg.

"Yes," cried Sim, "and——"

"You mean to blow up the wucks?" said Banks, with a sombre look in his countenance.

"Dal it all, Joe Banks," cried Sim, stamping with rage, "what d' yer want to go spoiling the climax like that how! You didn't make the plans."

"You are going to blow up the place as that cursed smooth-tongued liar will not agree for you to work?"

"Yes," said Sim, sulkily, "that's it."

"Lads," said Banks, "a week ago and I couldn't ha' done this. If he had shown but the least bit as he was sorry for what had passed, I'd ha' forgiven him. But I went to him to-day. I found him sitting in his garden smoking, and careless of the sufferings of his men. I went to him wi'out anger, but humbly, and begged of him to open the wucks again for the sake o' the wives and bairns 'most pining wi' hunger, and then—then"—

Joe Banks put his hand to his throat, for he was choking, but, struggling bravely, he went on.

"Then I begged on him to give me some tiding o' my poor bairn. I begged it o' him humbly, just to tell me she weer alive, and well; and to let me know wher we might send a line to her; for, lads, I've been broken and down like, and ready to do owt to get sight o' her again

for her mother's sake, for she's 'bout worn out wi' sorrow. I asked him this."

Banks stopped, with his face working, amidst the most profound silence, while Tom Podmore took his hand, which was heartily pressed, and Big Harry, after rubbing his eyes with his knuckles like a great schoolboy, crossed over, to double up his fists, and say—

"Joe Banks, say the word, mun, and I'll go oop t'house an' crack him like a nut."

"You as has bairns wean't think me an owd fool for this," said Banks, huskily. "Yow can feel for me."

"Ay, owd lad, we do that," rose in chorus; and then the foreman went on, with his voice gathering strength as he proceeded.

"I asked this of him for you, lads, and for mysen, and he turned upon me, cursed me for an owd fool, and ca'ed me the cause o' all his troubles. He swore he did'n' know nor keer where my poor bairn might be, and at last I comed awaya trembling all ower me, to wheer Tom Podmore here waited for me i' street; for," he continued, holding out his hands before him half-crooked, "if I'd ha' stayed, I should ha' throttled him wheer he stood; and for his moother's sake, his dead father's sake, an' that o' my poor lost bairn, I should ha' repented it till I died."

A low murmur ran through the room, and Sim Slee was about to rise and speak, but several of those present thrust him down, when, with a fierce and lowering countenance, the foreman turned upon him.

"Now," he said, "speak out, mun, what are your plans?"

"The plan is mine," said Sim; "and we go to work this how. We climb in by the little window in the lane, and then go into the low foundry and put two barrels o' powther theer under the middle wall."

Joe Banks nodded.

"Then we lay a train away to the leather, and put a slow match which we fires, comea awaya, and horny handed labour triumphs, and the wucks comes down."

"Good!" said Banks, nodding his head. "It will destroy them."

"That 'll do, wean't it?" continued Slee, eagerly.

"Yes, that will do," said Banks, in the midst of silence. "And the powther?"

"That is one barrel," said Barker; "the other is at Sim Slee's. Had'nt you better go on, Brother Slee, and make the arrangements?"

"Yes, brother sitterzens," said Slee, "there's the powther to place, and the train to lay. What do you say to Thuzday, this day week?"

"And when's it to be fired?" said Tom Podmore.

"Same time," said Sim; "it's anniversary o' last turn out, and we strikes for freedom. Who comes forward like a horny-handed hero to do the deed?"

"Not me," said Big Harry. "I aint going to mak' a Guy Fox o' *my*sen."

"Shame on you!" cried Sim. "Rise outer the slime in which you wallows, and in which the iron foot of the despot has crushed you. Rise! base coward, rise!"

"If thee ca's me a coward, Sim Slee," growled Harry, ominously, "dal me ef I don't mak' all thee bones so sore thee wean't know thee sen. I'll faight any two men i' the room, but dal all barrels of powther."

"Bah!" said Sim, contemptuously. "You'd be a martyr to a holy cause."

"Come away, now," whispered Tom Podmore, laying his hand on the foreman's shoulder.

"Nay, let's hear them out," was the reply.

"Ay, that's all faine enew," said Big Harry, "but I were in the blast when we cast that bell in the wet mowld."

"Bah!" cried Sim.

"Well, lad, look here now," said Big Harry, "you're a fine chap to talk; s'pose you do all the martyr wuck your own sen."

"I'm ashamed on you!" cried Sim, as this proposal was met by a burst of cheers. "Isn't theer one on you as will rise out of his sloth and slime, and prove hissen a paytriot. Didn't I mak' all the plans? Didn't I invent the plot? Am I to do everything? Hevn't I allays been scrarping about for the cause? Don't let me blush or you all, and feel as there isn't one as'll come forward

and lay the train. I'll do it," he continued, looking hard at Banks, who was staring at vacancy, "if no one else comes forward. I'll go and wuck for the holy mission, as I did over the cooting o' the bands, if there's no other paytriot as rises to the height."

Here there was a dead silence, and Barker broke it by saying—

"Had they not better draw lots?"

"Yes," said Sim, enthusiastically.

"Not if I knows it," said Big Harry, thrusting his hands further into his pockets.

"Say the plan ower again, mun," said Banks, in a low voice. "No mouthin', but joost the plan."

"To climb in at the little window."

"Yes."

"Lay the powther under the middle wall."

"Yes."

"Break open the staves to let it out—lay a good train—light a slow match close to the leather (ladder)."

"Yes."

"Run up and get out as you got in."

"Yes," said Joe Banks, softly, "or die."

"And you understand?"

"Yes."

"And the wucks 'll be blown to atoms."

"And what are we to do for wuck then?" said Big Harry.

"You great maulkin, you get no wuck now," cried Sim, and the big fellow grunted and looked uncomfortable.

"And you will do all this, Sim Slee?" said Banks, quietly.

"Who? I?" cried Sim, shrinking away.

Joe Banks looked at him contemptuously, and then turned to the men.

"I'll do it, my lads," he said. "No one knows the old plaace as I know it, and if it's to be blown down, mine's the hand as shall do it. Thuzday night? Good! Be three or four of you theer with the powther under the window, and I'll be ready to tak' it in."

There was a burst of applause at this, and the meeting broke up, the folded flags being carefully buttoned up in

Barker's breast, while Sim Slee walked stiffly home, with a sword down each leg of his trousers, and the hilts under his scarlet waistcoat, beneath his arms.

CHAPTER XLIII.

MR. SELWOOD HEARS NEWS.

THERE was a week clear before the plot was to have effect, and the place was wonderfully quiet. The vicar, looking very pale and anxious, was sitting in his study on the morning after the meeting at the Bull, when a note was brought to him from the Big House, and he coloured slightly as he read it.

"Tell the messenger I will be up directly," he said; and as the maid left the room, "what is wrong now? Come, come, be a man."

He smiled to himself as he took up his hat and stick, and walked up the street, to be greeted here and there with friendly nods.

He was shown at once into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Glaire was seated with Eve, and after a kindly, sad greeting, the latter left the room.

"I have good news for you, Mr. Selwood," said Mrs. Glaire, smiling, but looking worn and pale.

"I'm very glad," said the vicar, pressing her hand.

"Richard has promised me that if the men do not come in, he will give way and re-open the works."

"And when?" said the vicar, joyfully.

"He will call the men together this day week, for the furnaces to be lit, so as to begin work on the Monday."

"Mrs. Glaire, this is indeed good news," said the vicar. "May I see him and congratulate him?"

"I think it would be better not," said Mrs. Glaire. "But," she continued, watching his face as she spoke, "I have other news for you."

The vicar bowed.

"Yes," she said; "but first of all, though, these communications are made to you in strict confidence. You must not let the matter be known in the town, because my son would rather that the men gave way."

"If they do not, he really will?"

"He has given me his faithful promise," said Mrs. Glaire, "and he will keep it now."

"I will not doubt him," said the vicar. "I am very, very glad. And your other news?" he said, smiling.

"My son will be married very shortly."

"Married?" said the vicar, starting; "and to Daisy Banks?"

"No!" exclaimed Mrs. Glaire, in a short thick voice, a spasm seeming to catch her, as she spoke. "To his cousin, to whom he is betrothed."

There was a dead silence as the vicar, whose face was of an ashy pallor, looked straight before him at vacancy, while Mrs. Glaire sat watching him, with her hand placed to her side.

"You do not congratulate me," she said at last in a piteous tone. "Mr. Selwood, dear friend—the only friend I can fly to in this time of trouble—you will help me?"

"Help you?" he said in a stony way. "How can I help you?"

"I have striven so for this," she continued, speaking hastily. "They have long been promised to each other, and it will be for the best."

"For the best," he said, slowly repeating her words.

"Richard has been very wild, but he has given me his word now. He has not been what he should, but this marriage will sober and save him. Eve is so sweet, and pure, and good."

"So sweet—and pure—and good," he repeated, softly.

"She will influence him so—it will make him a good man."

"If woman's power can redeem, her's will," he said, in the same low tone.

"But you hardly speak—you hardly say a word to me," cried Mrs. Glaire, piteously; "and I have striven so for this end. I prevailed upon him to end this lock-out, and he has given way to me, and all will be well."

"Mrs. Glaire," said the vicar, sternly, "do you believe that your son has inveigled away that poor girl?"

"No, no," she cried, "I am as certain of his innocence as that I sit here."

"And Miss Pelly—what does she believe?"

"That he is innocent," exclaimed Mrs. Glaire.

"And—and—does she consent to this union?"

"Yes, yes," cried Mrs. Glaire, eagerly. "She feels hurt, and knows that she makes some sacrifice after my son's ill-treatment; but she forgives him, knowing that it will save poor Richard, and it is for my sake, too."

"Poor girl!" he said, beneath his breath.

"God bless her! She is a good, good girl," cried Mrs. Glaire.

"God bless her!" he said, softly. "Mrs Glaire, do you think she loves him?"

"Yes, yes; she has told me so a dozen times."

"And you feel that this is for the best? Would it not be better to let there be a year's term of probation first? It is a solemn thing this linking of two lives together."

"Oh, yes, it is for the best, Mr. Selwood—dear friend; and they must not wait. The wedding must be next week."

The vicar rose with the same stony look upon his face; and, knowing what she did, Mrs. Glaire's heart bled for him, and the tears stole down her cheeks, as she caught his hand and pressed it, but he seemed to heed it not, for he was face to face with a great horror. He had told himself that he could master his passion, and that it was mastered; but now—now that he was told that the woman he dearly loved was to become the wife of another, and of such a man, he felt stunned and helpless, and could hardly contain his feelings as he turned and half staggered towards the door.

"Mr. Selwood, you are shocked, you are startled," cried Mrs. Glaire, clinging to his hand. "You must not go like this."

He turned to look at her with a sad smile, but he did not speak.

"Eve wishes to see you," she faltered, hardly daring to say the words.

"To see me?" he cried, hoarsely; and her words seemed to galvanize him into life. Then, to himself, "I could not bear it—I could not bear it."

At that moment the door opened, and he made another effort over himself to regain his composure, as Eve came forward, holding out her hand, which he reverently kissed.

"Aunt has told you, Mr. Selwood," she said, in a low constrained tone.

"My child," he said, softly, and speaking as a father would to his offspring, "yes."

She gave a sigh of relief, looking at his cold, sad face, as if she wished to read that which was written beneath a mask of stone.

"Aunt thinks it would be for the best," she said, speaking slowly, and with a firmness she did not possess. "And it is to be soon."

He bowed his head, in token of assent.

"I have a favour to ask of you—Mr. Selwood," said Eve, holding out her trembling hand once more, but he did not take it.

"Yes?" he said, in a low constrained way.

"I want you to forgive Richard, and be friends."

"Yes, yes; of course," he said, hastily.

"And you will marry us, Mr. Selwood," continued Eve.

"I? I?" he exclaimed, with a look of horror upon his face. "Oh, no, no: I could not."

Eve looked at him in a strangely startled way, and for the moment her calmness seemed to have left her, when Mrs. Glaire interposed.

"For both our sakes; pray do not say that," she cried; and a curious look passed over the vicar's face.

"Do you wish it, Miss Pelly?" he said, softly.

"Yes; indeed, yes," exclaimed Eve, gazing in his eyes; and then there was silence for a few moments, when, making a mighty effort over himself, the vicar took a step forward, bent down, and kissed her forehead, and said—

"God bless you! May you be very happy."

"And you will?" exclaimed Mrs. Glaire.

"Yes," he said, after a moment's pause, and with his eyes half closed. "I will perform the ceremony."

"Thank you—thank you," exclaimed Mrs. Glaire, as she caught his hand. "Richard, here is Mr. Selwood."

CHAPTER XLIV.

JOHN MAINE'S CONFESSION.

"How do?" said Richard, entering from the garden; and he held out his hand sulkily, which the vicar took, and held for a moment.

He was about to speak, to say some words of congratulation—words that he had won a great prize, and that his duty to her was to make amends for the past—but the words would not come, and, bowing, he left the room, and walked hastily from the house, watched by Richard Glaire's malicious eyes. For it was sweet revenge to him to know that the hopes he was sure the vicar felt had been blasted, and that he alone would possess Eve Pelly's love.

"He thought to best me," muttered Richard; and he smiled to himself, the feeling of mastering the man he looked upon as his enemy adding piquancy to a marriage that had seemed to him before both troublesome and tame.

Meanwhile the vicar went slowly down the street, with a strange, dazed look; and more than one observer whispered to his neighbour—

"Say, lad; parson hasn't been takking his drop, sewerly."

"Nay, nay; I'd sooner believe he was ill. It can't be that," was the reply.

That same day, when busy out in the fields, sick at heart, and worried, after a short interview with Tom Podmore, John Maine was standing alone, and thinking of the past and present. Of the respite that had come to him, since the two men had visited the town, and of the miserable life he led at the farm, and the way in which Jessie behaved to him now; for, to his sorrow, it seemed to him that she looked upon him with a kind of horror, and avoided all communication. The keeper, Brough, came pretty frequently, and certainly she was more gracious to him than to the man who lived with her in the same house and ate at the same table.

Then he recalled that he had had a note from the vicar

requesting him to call at the vicarage; but he had not been, partly from dread, partly from shame.

"But I'll go," he said. "I'll be a man and go; go at once, and tell him the whole secret; and be at rest, come what may. Tom says it will be best."

He sat down beneath a hedge bottom to secure the strap of one of his leggings, when, raising his head, he saw in the distance, crossing one of the stiles, a figure which he knew at a glance was that of one of the men he dreaded—one of those who had done their best to make him another of the Ishmaelites who war against society.

A cold chill passed over him, followed by a hot perspiration, as he watched till the figure passed out of sight, and then he began to muse.

"Come at last, then. It must be with an object."

"Let me see," he thought; "it will be perfectly dark to-night. Nearly new moon. He has come down to see how the land lies, and before morning, unless he's checkmated, the vicarage will be wrecked, and if anybody opposes them, his life will be in danger."

"It's only a part of one's life," he said, bitterly, as he started up. "I've been a scoundrel, and I thowt I'd grown into a honest man, when I was only a coward. Now the time has come to show myself really honest, and with God's help I'll do it."

Not long after, the vicar was seated with his head resting upon his hand, strengthening himself as he termed it, and fighting hard to quell the misery in his breast, when Mrs. Slee came to the door.

"Yes," he said, trying to rouse himself, and wishing for something to give him a strong call upon the strength, energy, and determination lying latent in his breast. "Yes, Mrs. Slee?"

"Here's John Maine fro' the farm wants to see thee, sir."

"Show him in the study, Mrs. Slee; I'll be with him in five minutes." And those minutes he spent in bathing his temples and struggling against his thoughts.

The time had scarcely expired, when he entered the library, to find his visitor standing there, hat in hand, resting upon a stout oak sapling.

"Glad to see you, Maine," said the vicar, kindly. "Could you not find a chair?"

"Thanky, sir, no; I would rather stand. I ought to have been here before, but, like all things we don't want to do, I put it off. I want to tell you something, sir. I want to confess."

"Confess, Maine!" said the vicar, smiling; "any one would think this was Ireland, and that I was the parish priest."

"I have got something heavy on my conscience, sir," continued Maine, in a hesitating way.

"If I can help you, Maine, I am sure you may trust me," said the vicar.

"I know that, sir; I know that," cried Maine, eagerly. "I want to speak out, but the thoughts of that poor girl keep me back."

"That poor girl!" exclaimed the vicar, looking at the young man's anguish-wrung countenance, and feeling startled for the moment. "Do you mean Daisy Banks?"

"No, no, sir; no, no. Miss Jessie there at the farm. I can't bear for her to know. There, sir," he exclaimed, hurriedly, "it's got to come out, and I must speak, or I shall never get it said. You see, sir, when I was quite a boy, I was upon my own hands by the death of my father and mother. Then I drifted to Nottingham, where I was thrown amongst the lowest of the low; was mixed with poachers, and thieves, and scoundrels of every shape; always trying to get to something better, but always dragged back to their own level by my companions, who sneered at my efforts, and bullied me till my life was a curse, and I grew to feel more like an old man at eighteen than a boy.

"To make a long story short, sir, I could bear it no longer. I ran away from home—from that," he said, grimly, "that was my home—and kept away, working honestly for a couple of years, when some of the old lot came across me to jeer me, laugh at me, and end by proposing that I should rob my employer and run off with them. I was seen talking to the wretches, dismissed in disgrace from my situation, and went back to blackguardism and scoundreldom for a whole year, because no one

would give me a job of decent labour to do. Mr. Selwood, sir, you don't know how hard it is to climb the hill where honest people live—to get to be classed as one who is not always watched with suspicious eyes. It was a fearful fight I had to get there, against no one knows what temptations and efforts to drag me back. Sir, I got to honest work at last, and from that place came on here, where for years I've worked hopefully, and begun to feel that I need not blush when I looked an honest man in the face, nor dread to meet the police lest they should have learned something about my former life. In short, sir, I was beginning to feel that I need not go about always feeling that I had made a mistake in trying to leave my old life."

The vicar sat at the table with his head resting upon his hand, and face averted, feeling that he was not the only man in Dumford whose heart was torn with troubles, and he listened without a word as John Maine went on.

"There, sir, I can't tell you all the hopes and fears I have felt, as I have striven hard for years, hopefully, too, thinking that after all there might be a bright future in store for me, and rest out here at the pleasant old farm; and now, sir," he continued, huskily, and with faltering voice——

"Some of the old lot have turned up and found you again, eh, Maine?"

"Yes, sir, that's what it is," said the young man, starting; "and I thought I'd make a clean breast of it to you, and ask you, sir, to give me a bit of advice."

"I'm a poor one to ask for advice just now, Maine," said the vicar, sadly; "but I'll do my best for you."

"Thanky, sir; I thought you would."

"So you meant to give me some news?" continued the vicar, dryly.

"Yes, sir," said John Maine, "if you call it news," and he spoke bitterly.

"Well, no," said the vicar, making an effort to forget self; "I don't call it news. I knew all this some time ago."

"You knew it, sir?"

"Why, my good fellow, yes. Some weeks back, about as dirty an old cadger as it has ever been my fate to

encounter, pointed you out to me on the road, and told me the greatest part of your history."

"He did, sir?"

"Oh, yes, poor old fellow," said the vicar, bitterly, "I suppose he felt as if he could not die comfortably without doing somebody else an ill turn."

"Die, sir?"

"Yes, he was very ill: could hardly crawl, and I sent him on to Ranby Union, where he died."

"And you knew all this, sir?" faltered John Maine.

"Knew it, Maine? How could I help it? Mr. Keeper Brough, too, made a point of telling me that he had seen you talking to a couple of disreputable-looking scoundrels, evidently trading poachers. Don't you remember what a bad headache it gave you, Maine?"

The young man stared at the speaker, and could not find a word.

"He has been very busy I find, too, at the farm," continued the vicar, forgetting his own troubles in those of his visitor. "Mr. Bultitude does not like it, and he has been in a good deal of trouble about your nocturnal wanderings, friend John Maine."

"I can explain all that, sir," said Maine."

"Of course you can," said the vicar, coolly.

"But you knew of all this, sir?" faltered the young man.

"To be sure I did, John, and respected you for it; but I fear you have been giving poor Jessie a good deal of suffering through your want of openness."

"I'm afraid she thinks ill of me, sir."

"Don't say ill, John Maine. The poor girl is in trouble about you; and I believe has some idea that you and Podmore have been mixed up with the disappearance of Daisy Banks."

"Oh no, sir; no," cried the young man, warmly. "You don't think that, sir?"

"Certainly not, Maine," replied the vicar.

"And—Jessie—did Miss Jessie confide this to you, sir?"

"Yes, John Maine. I don't think, under the circumstances, it is any breach of confidence to say she did.

People have a habit of confiding their troubles to me—as I have none of my own," he added, sadly.

"And you, sir?"

"I told her she was mistaken," remarked the vicar; "but she was not convinced. She could not understand you and Podmore being out together by night. She thought it—girl-like—connected with some dreadful mystery. Master Brough thought it had to do with poaching; and I——"

"Yes, sir," cried Maine, eagerly.

"Thought you were out for some good purpose, John Maine; and that if I let the matter rest, the explanation would come all in good time."

"And so it has, sir," said John; "but you knew all about me, sir."

"To be sure I did, John Maine; and, seeing the life you now lead, respected you for it. It is a hard matter for a man brought up honestly to run a straight course, while for such as you, John Maine,—there, I need only say that you have wonderfully increased the respect I have for you by coming to me with this frank avowal. My letter to you was to give you the opportunity, for your own sake, so as to remove the suspicion that your movements were exciting. There, I am proud to shake hands with a man possessed of such a love of the reputable as to fight the good fight as you have fought it; and of such command over self, as to make the confession you have made to-day."

He stretched out his hand as he spoke, and John Maine wrung it in his—two strong palms meeting in a hearty grip for a few moments, while neither spoke.

Then John Maine turned away, and stood looking out of the window for a few moments.

"You've made me feel like a great girl, sir," he said at last, huskily.

"I've made you feel like a true man, John Maine," replied the vicar, "one without the false shame of custom about him."

"Thanky, sir, thanky," said the young fellow, recovering himself. "As to that night work, sir," he continued, with a quiet smile, "that's easily explained. I suspected

those scoundrels, after seeing them hanging about the vicarage here, of meaning to have some of your silver cups."

"And you watched the place by night, Maine?" said the vicar, eagerly.

"Well, sir, I did," replied the young man, "till Miss Jessie warned me about how my place there at the farm depended on my not going out o' nights, and then I put Tom Podmore on to the job."

"And has he watched ever since?"

"Oh, yes, sir; you may depend on that—every night. Tom's a trusty fellow, and when he takes to a man he'll go through fire and water to serve him. He'd do anything for you, sir."

The vicar said nothing, but his eyes looked a little dim for a few moments, and he drew in a long breath.

"And now, sir, I think I do bring you news," said Maine.

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir. If I'm not very much mistook they mean to rob this place to-night."

"You think so?" said the vicar, with his eyes sparkling; for here was what he had desired—something to call forth his energy, and serve to drown the thoughts that, in spite of his power over self, nearly drove him mad.

"Yes, sir, I think so," replied Maine, "for they had a good look round the place when they came to the back door, and tried to wheedle Mrs. Slee. Now they've been away and made their plans, and come back. I've seen one of them to-day."

"This is news," said the vicar, musing. "These are the men the police sought to overtake on the day after poor Daisy Banks's disappearance; but if we set the police after them now, we shall scare them away. John Maine, we must catch these night-birds ourselves. Get Tom Podmore to come here."

"I spoke to him before I came in, but he's got something on his mind and could not come."

"Then we must do it ourselves. You'll help me, Maine?"

"That I will, sir, with all my strength."

"Good; then we can manage this little task without disturbing the police till to-morrow morning; when, if we are lucky, we shall be able to send for them to take charge of our prisoners."

CHAPTER XLV.

WHERE JOHN MAINE HAD BEEN.

It was a very miserable breakfast at the farm the next morning, for old Bultitude was looking very black and angry, and it was quite evident that poor little Jessie had been in tears.

"What time did that scoundrel go out?" said the farmer, stabbing a piece of ham savagely with his fork, and after cutting a piece off as if it were a slice off an enemy, he knocked out the brains of an egg with a heavy dash of his tea-spoon.

"Don't call him a scoundrel, uncle dear," sobbed Jessie. "I don't know."

"I will, I tell 'ee," cried the old man, furiously. "I won't hev him hanging about here any longer, a lungeing villain. Leaving his wuck and going off, and niver coming back all neet. Look thee here, Jess; if thee thinks any more about that lad, I'll send thee away."

"No no, uncle dear, don't say that," cried the girl, going up to him and clinging to him. "He may have been taken ill, or a dozen things may have happened."

"O' coorse. Theer, I niver see such fools as girls are; the bigger blackguard a man is, the more the women tak's his part. Sit thee down, bairn; theer, I aint cross wi' you; I on'y want to do what's best for you, for I wean't see thee wed to a shack."

He kissed poor Jessie affectionately, and bade her "make a good breakfast," but the poor girl could not touch a morsel.

"Hillo! who's this?" said the farmer, a few minutes later. "Oh, it's young Brough. Come in, lad, come in."

"Hooray, farmer!" he cried, all eagerness and delight. "I telled you so—I telled you so, and you wouldn't believe

it, and Miss Jessie theer turned like a wood cat, and was ready to scrat my eyes out."

Jessie's colour came and went as her little bosom heaved, and she turned her chair so as to avoid the keeper's gaze.

"What did'st tell me?" said the farmer, gruffly.

"Why, that John Maine was out ivery night skulking 'bout the vicarage whiles he should ha' been at home i' bed like an honest man. And I telled ye he was in co. wi' a couple o' poachers and thieves over here fro' one of the big towns; and I telled you he weer nobbut a tramp hissen."

"How dare you speak of him like that?" cried Jessie, starting up with flashing eyes, and stamping her foot. "You wouldn't dare to speak so to John Maine's face, for fear he should beat you."

"Hoity, toity!" exclaimed the farmer. "Who told theeto speak, lass? Let the man finish."

"I will not sit here and listen to such talk," cried Jessie, angrily, and with an energy which plainly told her feelings towards the missing man. "Let him wait till John comes."

"That wean't never be," said the keeper, with a grin of satisfaction. "Because why? Just as I towd thee, farmer, there weer a robbery at the vicarage last night."

"No!" cried old Bultitude, starting up with his mouth full.

"Ay, mun, but there weer," cried Brough, in an exulting tone. "Just as I said theer'd be, all plotted and planned out to get the parson's silver cups and toots—all plotted and planned out by John Maine and his blackguard mates. Thank your stars, and you too, Miss Jessie, as you haven't both been robbed and murdered."

"I wean't believe it," cried the old farmer, angrily. "John Maine's got a bit wrong somehow, but he isn't the lad to rob nowt. He's raight to a penny always wi' his accounts."

"That's his artfulness," sneered Brough.

"Yah!" cried the farmer. "You've got hold of a cock and bull story up town, wheer they'll turn a slip on the causay into fower fatal accidents 'fore the news has got from the top of the High Street to the bottom."

As he spoke Jessie crossed over to her uncle, laid her hands upon his shoulder, and stood with her eyes flashing indignant protest against the accuser of her lover.

"Hev it your own waya," said Brough, quietly. "I were up at 'station, when parson comes in hissen, and tell'd Bowley that the party on 'em broke in at the vicarage last night, 'bout half-past twelve, and that he'd fote the men, and got 'em locked up, and John Maine wi' 'em. Them's parson's own words; and if parson's words arn't true, dal it all, who's is?"

"I'll never, never believe it," cried Jessie, with an angry burst of indignation; and then, bursting into tears, she ran out of the room, sobbing bitterly.

"Poor little lass!" said old Bultitude, softly, "she thinks a deal more o' John Maine than she does o' thee, my lad. But look here: I believe i' John Maine after all, and shall go on believing in him, though I am a bit popped agin him, till I sees him foun' guilty. Yow set me watching the lad one night, you know, Brough, and it all turned out a bam, for there he weer, safe in his bed. Just you let things bide till we know more 'bout 'em; and I don't thank ye, young man, for coming and spoiling my brackfast."

"Just as yow like, Master Bultitude," said the keeper, sourly; "but just answer me one question, Weer John Maine at home all last night?"

"No," said the farmer, savagely, "and he aint been back yet; but that don't prove he weer lungeing 'bout parson's. How do I know he wasn't at Bosthorpe Dancing?"

"Bostrop Dancing weer day afore yesterday," said the keeper, grinning, as he made this retort about the village feast. "Oh, here comes parson."

"Morning, Mr. Bultitude," said the vicar, coming in, looking rather grave. "Ah Miss Jessie, how are you?" he continued, as, on hearing his voice, the girl stole back into the room. "Nice neighbours you are, to lie snug in bed and let your poor vicar be robbed, and murdered, and carried off in a cart."

Jessie sank into a chair, looking as white as ashes, while Brough rubbed his hands joyously.

"Then it's all true?" said the farmer, slowly.

"True?" Oh, yes, true enough," said the vicar. "I got the scoundrels safely locked up in the cellar."

"Howd up, my lass, howd up," whispered the farmer, kindly, as he laid his hand on Jessie's shoulder; "be a woman and let's hear the worst." Then to the vicar: "An' was John Maine wi' 'em, sir?"

"Oh, yes, he was with them," said the vicar, wondering.

"Theer, I telled you so," cried Brough, exultantly, "I know'd how he'd turn out."

The vicar smiled slightly at this, as he noticed the malice of the man, and he repeated slowly—

"Yes, John Maine was there."

The last trace of colour faded out of Jessie's cheeks, and a dull look of stony despair came over her countenance, while the old farmer shifted his position and began to dig a fork savagely into the deal table.

"Dal me—" began the old man, but he stopped short.

"Just as I telled thee," said Brough, eagerly.

"Dal thee! don't set thee clapper going at me," roared the old man. "I know it, don't I?"

"Yes," said the vicar, smiling, as he took and patted Jessie's hand; "John Maine was there, and a braver ally I never had."

"What?" roared the farmer.

"After watching my house, and setting young Podmore to watch it," said the vicar, "he came and warned me about his suspicions, and——"

"Dal me!" cried old Bultitude, "you kep' him there all night, parson, to help you?"

"I did," said the vicar.

"And took the rascals?"

"Yes, with John Maine's help."

"It's a-maazing," said the old man, slapping his thigh, and bursting into a tremendous series of chuckles. "Oh, parson, you are a one-er, and no mistake."

The vicar was conscious of two looks as Jessie ran from the room—one of black indignation, directed at Brough; the other a soft, tender glance of thankfulness at himself, ere the poor girl once more ran up into her own room to "have a good cry."

"Let me see," said old Bultitude, drily; "I don't think theer was owt else as you wanted to tell me, was theer, Master Brough?"

"Not as I knows on, farmer," said the keeper, looking from one to the other.

"Because, being churchwarden, theer's a thing or two I want to talk over wi' parson—calling a meeting for next week, like."

"Oh, I can go," said the keeper, in an offended tone—"I can go if it comes to that;" and then, as no one paid any attention to him, he strode out, his departure being made plain by a loud yelping noise outside, and the voice of one of the labourers being heard to exclaim—

"I shouldn't ha' thowt yow'd kick a dog like that, Master Brough."

While the vicar sat down and told the adventures of the past night.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A BUSY NIGHT.

As soon as John Maine had promised to stay with him, the vicar sat down, and seemed for a few minutes to be thinking.

"I should like," he said at last, "to have a regular good stand-up fight with these scoundrels if they come; but I'm a man of peace now, Maine, and must act accordingly."

"I'll do the fighting, sir," said Maine, excitedly.

"No, that will not do either, my man. We must have no fighting. We must bring the wisdom of the serpent to bear. You must not stir from here, or we shall alarm the enemy. They may have seen you come, but that's doubtful; but if I let you go and come back again, the chances are that they may have scouts out, and then they must see you. Let the farm people fidget about you for one night. Old Bultitude will get in a rage, and Miss Jessie will cast you off; but I'll go and smooth all that to-morrow. Mrs. Slee will go home, and we'll send the girl to bed as usual. If I keep you out of sight, she will think you are gone. By the way, who's that?"

He slipped behind one of the window curtains, and

watched as a decrepit old man carrying some laces and kettle-holders for sale in one hand, a few tracts in the other, came slowly up the garden path, to stand as if hesitating which way to go; but glancing keenly from window to door, making observations that would not have been noticed at any other time, before slinking painfully round to the back of the house, where Mrs. Slee's sharp voice was soon after heard, and the old man came back at last with a good-sized piece of bread and meat.

"You old rascal!" said the vicar, as he shook his fist at the departing figure. "That scoundrel, Maine, not only tries to rob the rich but through his trickery he indirectly steals from the poor by hardening the hearts of the charitable. There's no doubt about what you say, John Maine; that fellow's a spy from the enemy's camp—the siege has commenced."

The time flew by: evening came, and at last the hour for prayers. All had seemed quiet in the town, and at last the vicar rang, and Mrs. Slee and the maid came in.

"You'll stay to prayers, Maine?" said the vicar, quietly; and the young man knelt with the rest, while in a low, calm voice, the evening supplications for protection and thanks for the past were offered up—as quietly as if nothing was expected to shortly occur and quicken the pulses.

"Good night, Mrs. Slee," said the vicar; then, "I'll see to the front door myself."

Then the fastening of shutters was heard, followed by the closing of the back door, and its fastening, Mrs. Slee's steps sounding plainly on the gravel path, as she went to her cottage. Lastly, the maid was heard upon the stairs, and her door closed.

At the same time John Maine followed the vicar into the hall, the latter talking to him loudly for a few minutes, and then the front door was noisily opened and shut.

"The girl will think you have gone now," said the vicar; "so come into the study, and pull off those heavy boots."

The vicar set the example, placing his afterwards at the foot of the stairs in the hall, and hiding those of John Maine in an out-of-the-way cupboard.

"Now then, we'll have these two in case of accident," he said, detaching a couple of Australian waddies from the wall; "but I don't think we shall want them. I'll prepare for the rascals in the study, for that's where they will break in, and we must not be long before my light goes up to my room. They know all my habits by this time, I'll be bound."

There was a neat, bright little copper kettle on the hob in the study, and on returning, the vicar unlocked his cabinet, placed a cut lemon on the table, and a sugar-glass, a knife with which he cut some slices of lemon, placing one in a tumbler, pouring in a little water, and macerating the slice after it had been well stirred. Then by the side he placed a half-smoked cigar and an ashpan, sprinkled some of the ash upon the cloth, and finished all off with the presence of a quaint little silver-tipped bottle labelled "Gin."

"They'll give me the credit of having been enjoying myself to-night, Maine," said the vicar, smiling, as he held the bottle up to the light, took out the silver-mounted cork, and from one side of the cabinet, amongst a row of medicine phials, he took a small blue flask, removed the stopper, measured a certain quantity in a graduated glass, and poured the clear pleasant-smelling fluid into the gin.

"I see, now, sir," said Maine, who had been puzzled at the vicar's movements, as he recorked the spirit-bottle, and placed back the glass and tiny flask—movements which seemed indicative of arrangements for passing a comfortable night.

"To be sure," said the vicar. "Let them only set down to a glass apiece of that—as they certainly will, for the rogues can't pass drink—and all we shall have to do will be to bundle them neck and crop down into the cellar to sleep if off, ready for the attendance of the police in the morning. There will be four in the gang—three to come here, and a fourth to wait somewhere handy with a horse and cart. It will only be a glass apiece."

"What makes you think that they will break in here, sir?" asked John Maine.

"Because there are no iron bars to the window, and no

one sleeps overhead. Now, then, all's ready, so we'll go upstairs."

"But won't you stay and stop them from getting in, sir?"

"Certainly not, Maine. Let them walk into the trap, and we will keep awake as well as we can in the dark."

Lighting a chamber candle, the vicar turned out the lamps, and led the way to his bedroom, where, after placing an easy chair for his companion, he apparently busied himself for a quarter of an hour in undressing, taking care to cast his shadow several times upon the window-blind, then placing matches ready, and the door open, he extinguished the light.

"Half-past ten, Maine," he whispered. "Now for a long watch. Can you keep awake?"

"I think so, sir," was the reply.

"Good; then listen attentively, and warn me of the slightest sound, but no word must be spoken above a whisper. No conversation."

One hour in the solemn silence of the night, and no sound was heard. Once the vicar stretched out his hand to have it pressed in reply by way of showing that his companion was on the alert.

Another hour passed, and all was perfectly still. The vicar had had no difficulty in keeping awake, for his thoughts were upon the scene that had taken place up at the House; and though he strove to drive away the remembrance, and to nerve himself for the struggle that must be his for weeks to come, there was Eve Pelly's sweet gentle face before him, seeming to ask him wistfully to accede to her wish.

At last John Maine, believing him to be asleep, touched his arm.

"Yes," was the whispered answer. "I heard them five minutes ago. There they are."

At that moment a singular low grating noise was heard.

"Diamond cutting glass," said the vicar, with his lips close to his companion's ear.

A sharp crack.

"There goes the pane," whispered the vicar.

Then there was the creak—creak—creak of a window being softly raised, after the fastening had been thrust back. Then, again, perfect silence, succeeded at last by a gentle rustling noise; but so quietly had the entry been made that but for a faint glimmer of light seen now and then through the open door, there was nothing to indicate that anything below was wrong.

The watchers sat listening with their hearts beating with a heavy dull pulsation, till at length a stair creaked, as if from the weight of some one ascending, and they fancied they could hear the hard breathing of some listener. This ceased in a very short time, and they instinctively knew that the burglar had returned to the study, where the clink of a glass warned them that the bait had proved sufficient attraction for the wolves.

There was another pause and a faint whisper or two, followed by the soft rustling made by the men crossing the little hall to the dining-room, from whence arose the metallic sound of silver touching silver. Then there came more rustling and chinking, and John Maine whispered,

"Pray, let's go and stop them, sir: they'll get away with the plate."

"Oh, no," said the vicar in the same tone. "Wait."

They waited, and the rustling made by the men crossing the hall back to the study was again heard, and then, for some little time, there was silence.

"They must be gone, sir," whispered Maine, but almost as he spoke there came up from below a dull, heavy, stertorous snore, which was soon after accompanied by the heavy hard breathing of a sleeper, and an occasional snort and muttering as of some one talking in his slumber.

"I think we may strike a light now, Maine," said the vicar, quietly; and as he did so, and lit the chamber-candle, John Maine moistened his hand to take a good grip of his waddy.

"Oh, we shan't need that," said the vicar, smiling. "Come along."

He led the way downstairs to the study, where, on looking in, there lay one man extended upon the hearth-

rug; another was on the couch; and the third slept heavily in the easy chair, with his head hanging over the arm, his uneasy position causing him to utter the snorts and mutterings that had ascended the stairs.

It was only a matter of ten minutes or so for the watchers to drag their prisoners down to the little cellar, where some straw was placed beneath their head to save them from suffocation. Then the great key was turned, and the vicar and his companion returned to the study.

"Now for number four, John Maine," said the vicar. "Come along."

He resumed his boots, and John Maine was following his example when a low chirp was uttered, and a head appeared at the window.

John Maine was nearest, and he made a dash at the owner; but with a rush he disappeared, and before the garden-gate could be reached wheels and the sound of a horse galloping came to the pursuers' ears.

"He has gone, John Maine," said the vicar, coolly. "Never mind, the police may come across him. We have to go back and watch our prisoners."

They re-entered the house, to find that the servant girl had not been alarmed, and taking it in turns to lie down on the couch, the vicar and John Maine kept watch and ward till morning, when, awaking in a fearful state of alarm, the scoundrels began to try the door, and at last appealed pitifully for mercy, as the vicar was replacing in order the cups and pieces of plate arranged ready for conveyance to the cart.

Soon after he walked up to the station, and afterwards made his way to the farm, to set them at rest about John Maine, with the result that has been seen.

CHAPTER XLVII.

A MYSTERIOUS WARNING.

THE day following that on which the scoundrels who had made the attempt on the vicarage had been sent off to the county town, the vicar was in his garden musing on his future, and thinking whether it was his duty to leave Dumford, and go far away, as life there had become a

torture; but everything seemed to tend towards the point that it was his duty to stay and forget self in trying to aid others. In spite of the past it seemed to him that he had done good; Richard Glaire had listened to reason; the strike was nearly over, and the men had settled down into a calmer state of resignation to their fate. So quiet were they that he more than suspected that they had some inkling of the change coming on. Then, too, he had made peace at the farm, where the wedding of John Maine and Jessie was shortly to take place, John, at his instigation, having frankly told the farmer the whole of his past life, to be greeted with a tremendous clap on the shoulder and called "a silly sheep."

"Just as if thou could'st help that, lad," said the old man. "Why didstn't out wi' it at first?"

And then Eve's wedding.

"Poor girl! she wishes it," the vicar said to himself, continuing his musing, as he stopped to tie up a flower here and there. "It would be madness to interpose, and God help her, she will redeem him, and—I hope so—I hope so."

"Well, I must stay," he said, with a weary smile upon his face. "I am a priest, and the priests of old looked upon self-denial as a duty. Let it be mine to try and perfect the peace that is coming back to this strange old place."

"Paarson!"

He started and looked round, but no one was visible, and yet a deep rough voice he seemed to know had spoken.

"Paarson!" was repeated, apparently close to his feet where he was standing by the garden hedge.

"Who is it?"

"Niver mind who it is," said the voice. "I joost want a word wi' you."

"Where are you?"

"Lying down here i' th' dyke. I had to creep here 'mong the nattles like a big snail."

"Well, come out, man, and speak to me."

"Nay, nay, that wean't do."

"What, is it you, Harry?"

"Howd your tongue, wilt ta, paarson. I don't wan't the lads to know as I comed and telled you. I've come along fower dykes."

"What does it all mean?" said the vicar, leaning over the hedge, to see the great hammer-man lying on his face in the ditch on the field side.

"Don't ask no questions, paarson, for I wean't tell nowt, 'cause I'm sweered not to; but I don't like what's going on."

"Well, but tell me, Harry, I beg—I insist——"

"I wean't tell thee nowt, paarson, on'y this here. You wouldn't like them as you knows hurt, so joost tell Dicky Glaire to look out."

"But why—when? I must know more."

The only answer was a loud rustling, and the great body of the hammer-man could be seen crawling through the nettles as he made his way pretty quickly along in the opposite direction to that in which he had come, and the vicar forbore to pursue, as it might have tended to betray him.

"I'm not without friends, after all," he said, musing. "Then this quietness is only the precursor of some other storm. I'll go up at once."

He made his way straight to the House, and all was very quiet in the town. Men were lounging about, and their thin sad-faced wives were to be seen here and there busy within, but no sign was visible of the coming storm; and for a while the vicar was ready to doubt the possibility of anything threatening, till he recalled Big Harry's action, and felt certain that the man's words must be true. Any doubt he might have had was, however, dispelled a moment or two later, for he saw Tom Podmore coming towards him; but as soon as the young man caught sight of the vicar he turned sharply round and went away.

"There is something wrong, and he's mixed up in it," muttered the vicar. "Of course, he is Big Harry's friend, and so the great fellow knew it. Perhaps, though, he sent him to caution me!"

It was a random shot, but it hit the mark, for Tom, being held in suspicion by his fellows, could not well stir

in the matter; and in talking it over with Big Harry, the latter had declared he would warn parson, and so he had.

The vicar was shown in directly, and found the family at the House seated together. He was rather shocked to see Eve's pallid face; but she brightened up at his coming, and seemed to him to be trying to show him how happy they once more were.

Mrs. Glaire, too, looked pale and careworn, but she was eager in her ways, and glad to see him, while Richard, in a half-civil way, but with a shifty look in his eye, shook hands and muttered something about the weather.

"Here, Eve, we'll go down the garden together," said Richard; "Mr. Selwood's come to see my mother."

"No," said the vicar, quietly, "I have come to see you."

"To see me?"

"Yes; on very important business."

"If you've come from those scoundrels," said Richard, hotly, "I wont hear a word. Let them come themselves."

"Richard!" said Mrs. Glaire, imploringly.

"I don't care, mother. I've given way to a certain extent, and I'll go no further."

"But I have not come from the men," said the vicar.

"Then what is it?" said Richard, who had a horror of being left alone with his visitor. "Speak out."

"I would rather tell you in private," said the vicar, glancing uneasily at the two women.

"If it is any fresh trouble, Mr. Selwood, pray speak out," said Mrs. Glaire, anxiously.

"But Miss Pelly?"

"Richard is to be my husband in a few days, Mr. Selwood," said Eve, smiling sadly, as she rose and stood beside him, with her hands resting on his shoulder. "If it is trouble, I have a right to share it with him."

"There, let's have it," said Richard, rudely. "They will have to hear whatever it is."

The vicar hesitated a moment or two, and tried to collect himself, for Eve's last words sent a pang through his breast, as they seemed to tear the last fibre that had held her to him.

At last he spoke.

"I have little to tell. My news is shadowy and undefined, but I fear it is very real."

"Well, tell me, man, tell me," said Richard; who, while assuming an air of bravado, began to look white.

"I will, Mr Glaire. One of your workmen came secretly to me within the last half-hour to bid you be on your guard."

"I haven't been off," said Richard, insolently. "Who was it?"

"That I cannot tell you," said the vicar. "The man said he had been sworn to secrecy, but he did not like the business, and came at all risks to tell me."

"It was that scoundrel, Tom Podmore," cried Richard.

"It was not Podmore," replied the vicar.

"Then it was that old villain, Joe Banks—an old hypocrite. Forced his way down the garden to me the other evening to bully me."

"Richard, my boy, for heaven's sake," cried Mrs. Glaire.

"It was not your old foreman, Mr. Glaire," said the vicar, quietly. "I have told you all. It is very little, but it may mean much. If you will take my advice you will counteract the people's plans by opening your works to-morrow."

"Yes, Richard, do!" exclaimed Mrs. Glaire and Eve in a breath.

"I said I'd open them on a certain day, and I won't stir a peg from that decision," cried Richard, obstinately.

"Whom the gods will destroy, they first make mad," muttered the vicar to himself, in the old Latin.

"It would be giving way to them," said Richard, "and that I'll never do."

"But you give way when you do open," said the vicar.

"I'm not going to argue that," said Richard, haughtily; "I've made up my mind, and I shall keep to it."

"Then leave your orders, and go quietly away for a few days, till the works are in full swing again."

Richard had made up his mind to do that very thing; but, as the vicar proposed it, and Eve eagerly acquiesced, he was dead against it on the instant.

"I shall stay here," he said, firmly, "and have the police to guard the house."

"It is like inviting attack," said the vicar, excitedly. "For your mother's and Miss Pelly's sake, don't do that. It is throwing down the gauntlet to a set of men maddened by a belief in their wrongs. Many of them are fierce with hunger."

"Bah! Stuff!" said Richard; "they've got plenty saved up, and—he, he, he!—nicely they've humbugged you into relieving them with soup and bread and meat. You don't know Dumford yet, Mr. Selwood."

"If I am to know it as you know it," thought the vicar, "I hope I never shall;" but he did not give utterance to his thoughts.

"I shall go——" began Richard; then, insolently—"You won't go and betray me, parson, will you?"

The vicar did not reply.

"I shall go and stay over at the works, mother," said Richard.

"What!" exclaimed Mrs. Glaire.

"Stay over at the works till the opening day. Let the brutes think I have left the town; and, with a few blankets and some provisions, I shall do. I'll go over to-night."

"But, Richard, this is folly," cried Eve, beginning to tremble.

"You don't know anything about it," he said, sharply. "If the beasts mean mischief again, they'll try to get me away from here, and most likely they are watching every train to catch me. If I slip over in the middle of the night, I shall be safe; for no one will think I am there. What do you say, parson?"

The vicar sat thinking for a few moments, and then gave his acquiescence to the plan.

"But you must keep strictly in hiding," he said.

"Well, it won't be for long," replied Richard; "and won't be more dull than being in here."

Eve winced a little, but she turned and tried to smile.

"But would it be wise, Mr. Selwood?" exclaimed Mrs. Glaire, eagerly.

"Yes; I think it would," said the vicar, "if he can get there unseen. If these misguided men do search for him, that is one of the last places they will go to, I feel sure. But will you keep closely in hiding? Would it not be better to give way at once?" he continued, addressing Richard.

"I have said what I mean to do," said Richard, sharply "and what I say I keep to."

The vicar bowed his head, and lent himself as much as was likely to be acceptable to the scheme; ending by saying, with a smile on his face—

"I hope, Miss Pelly, that this is the last of these unpleasant affairs we shall ever have here; for rest assured I shall lose no time in trying to bring the people to a better way of thinking."

He rose and left them, it being thoroughly understood that Richard was to go into hiding that very night, while the vicar would communicate with the police, to ensure some protection for the house; though all felt it to be needless, as any attack was certain to be made on Richard personally.

As he reached the door, though, the vicar turned to Richard—

"Shall I come and be your companion every night? I will come. I can sleep on a bare board with any fellow, and," he added, smiling, "I enjoy a pipe."

Richard jumped eagerly at the idea, and was about to say yes, but the evil part of his nature prevailed.

"No," he said, rudely; "when I want Mr. Selwood's help I will ask for it."

"As you will, Mr. Glaire," was the reply; "and I hope you will. Good-bye, Mrs. Glaire—Miss Pelly, and I sincerely hope this will prove a false alarm."

"If that fellow thinks he's coming to my place after the marriage, he's grievously mistaken," said Richard to himself, and the door closed.

Meanwhile the vicar called at the station, and after a few words about the burglary and the forthcoming examination—

"By the way, Smith," he said to the constable, "will you and your man oblige me by keeping a strict watch

over the House—Mr. Glaire's—for the next week? I have my reasons."

"Certainly, sir," was the reply; "and, by the way, sir, my missus's duty to you for the port wine: it's doing her a sight o' good."

"Glad of it, Smith; send down for some more when that's done."

"He's a good sort," muttered the policeman, "that he is; but he ought to have sent up for me the other night."

The vicar strolled back towards the bottom of the town, and turning off, was making his way towards the foreman's cottage, when he came upon Big Harry, with a stick and a bundle, going across the field-cut to the station.

The great fellow tried to get away, but the vicar hailed him, and he stopped.

"Now, don't thee ask queshtuns, paarson," he exclaimed; "I tell'd ye I'm sweered, and can't say owt."

"I will not ask you anything, Harry," said the vicar; "only thank you, as I do, for your hint. But where are you going?"

"Sheffle first, Birming after. I'm sick o' this."

"Going to get work?"

"Yes, paarson."

"Why not stop another week?"

"No," said the big fellow; "I wean't stay another day. I'm off."

"You've got some other reason for going?"

"Paarson, I wean't tell'ee owt," said the big fellow; "theer."

"Good-bye, Harry," said the vicar, smiling, and holding out his hand. "I hope I shall see you back again, soon."

"That you will, paarson, soon as iver they've done striking; as for me, I'm longing to get howd of a hammer again. Good-bye."

"I should like to know more," said the vicar, as he saw the great fellow go striding away. "There's some atrocious plan on hand, and he's too honest to stop and join in it, while he's too true to his friends to betray them

There's some fine stuff here in Dumford; but, alas, it is very, very rough.

His walk to the cottage was in vain. "My master' was out, so Mrs. Banks, who looked very sad and mournful, declared.

"He's out wandering about a deal, sir, now. But hev you had word o' my poor bairn?"

"I am very sorry to say no, Mrs. Banks," said the vicar, kindly; and he left soon after, to be tortured by the feeling that he would be doing wrong in marrying Richard Glaire and his cousin, for he still suspected him of knowing Daisy's whereabouts, and could get no nearer to his confidence now than on the first day they met.

He inadvertently strolled to the spot where they had first encountered, and stood leaning against the stile, thinking of all that had since passed, wondering the while whether he might not have done better amongst these people if he had been the quiet, reserved, staid clergyman of the usual type—scholarly, refined, and not too willing to make himself at home.

"It is a hard question to answer," he said at last, as he turned to go home, listening to the ringing song of the lark far up in the blue sky, unstained by the smoke of the great furnace and the towering shaft; "it is a hard question to answer, and I can only say—God knows."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

A REVELATION.

It was the day of the plot concocted by Sim's Brotherhood, the members of which body had been perfectly quiet, holding no meeting, and avoiding one another as they brooded over their wrongs, and in their roused state of mind rejoiced at the idea of their cunning revenge.

Had the vicar been ignorant of coming danger he would have suspected it, for men who had been in the habit of frankly returning his salutations or stopping to chat, now refused to meet his eye, or avoided him by crossing the road.

He shuddered as he thought of what might be done,

but as the last day had come, he was in hopes that it might pass over safely, for Richard had kept closely to his hiding-place, and the rumour had got abroad that he had left the town.

He bore this good news to the House.

"Let him only keep to his hiding-place to-night, Mrs. Glaire," he said; "and to-morrow give out the announcement that the works are opened, and the men once met, we shall have tided over our trouble."

"Yes, *our* trouble," said Mrs. Glaire, pressing his hand. "Mr. Selwood, I repent of not taking you more into my confidence."

"I am glad you have made so great a friend of me as you have," was the reply; and he rose to go.

"You will stop and see Eve," said Mrs. Glaire.

"No," he said, sadly; "not now. Good-bye, good-bye."

"I've done him grievous wrong," exclaimed Mrs. Glaire, wringing her hands as soon as she was alone; "but it was fate—fate. I must save my poor wilful wandering boy."

The vicar prayed for that day and night to hasten on, that his poor people might be met, ere they assembled for any ill design, by the news of Richard Glaire's yielding to them, and the opening of the works; but night seemed as if it would never come. He could not rest; the dread of impending evil was so strong upon him, and he was going about from house to house all day, and called several times at the police-station.

His mind was in a whirl, and yet the town had never seemed more quiet nor fewer people about. The works, with their dull windows and blank closed doors, looked chill and bare; and as he passed he scanned the place, and wondered whereabouts Richard could be hidden. Then he began to think of the coming marriage, and his heart grew heavier still; and at last, after endless calls, he went to the vicarage, and threw himself into a chair, to find Mrs. Slee quite excited about him.

"Thee's hardly had bite or soop to-day, sir," she cried. "Yow'll be ill;" and in spite of his remonstrances, she brought him in the dinner that had been waiting for hours, and insisted upon his eating it.

He partook of it more for the sake of gaining strength than from appetite, and then made up his mind to go up the town, and watch the night through; for it was now dark.

It was about eight o'clock that a woman in a cloak, and wearing a thick veil, entered the town, followed by a great burly man, and going straight up to the House, rang and asked to see Mrs. Glaire.

"I don't think you can see her, she's out," said the girl, looking at the visitor suspiciously, the man having stopped back; but as she was closing the door, it was pushed open, and Tom Podmore almost forced his way in.

The girl was about to scream, but, on recognising him, she stared wonderingly.

"Let me speak to her for a moment, Jane Marks," he said. "Shoot the door."

"No, no; I can't. I shall get into trouble," said the girl.

"I've come to save you fro' trouble," said Tom. "Do as I tell you, quick. This is no time for stopping, when at any moment a mob of savage workmen may be ready to tear down the place."

He pointed to the veiled figure as he spoke, and the girl drew back, while the strange visitor shrank to the wall. But only for a moment; the next she uttered a sob, and holding out her hands, she cried :—

"Oh, Tom, Tom; did you know me?"

"Know you," he said, bitterly; "yes, I'd tell thee anywheers."

"Wean't you tak' my hands?" she cried.

"Niver again, lass, niver again."

"Is this the way you meet me, then, Tom?"

"Ay, lass. How would'st thou hev me meet thee? Why hev you comed here?"

"Oh, Tom, I was i' Sheffle, and I met Big Harry. He told me such dreadful things about father."

"I wonder he didn't tell thee the old man weer dead."

"Oh, Tom, if you knew all," cried the girl.

"Ay, lass, I know enew."

"Tom, you don't—you can't know. But there, I can't stay. It's so dreadful. Let me go by."

"No, Daisy," said the young man, passionately. "You can't go by. I believe I hate thee now, but I can't leave thee. You must go wi' me."

"Go with you—where?" cried the girl.

"To your own home, where your poor broken-hearted mother's waiting for thee."

"Oh, I shall go mad," exclaimed Daisy. "Tell me. Where is Mrs. Glaire? Where is Mr. Richard?"

"You weak, silly girl," said Tom, catching her arm. "I knew it was so, though they said strange things about thee. Oh, Daisy," he said, piteously, as he sought to stay her, "leave him. Go home. Don't for thee own sake stop this how. You threw away my poor, rough love, and I've towd my sen ower and ower again that I hated thee, but I don't, Daisy. I'm only sorry for thee, I can't forget the past."

He turned aside to hide the workings of his face.

"How dare you speak to me like this?" cried Daisy. "You don't know me, Tom, or you would not. I'll go, I will not be so insulted, and by one who pretended so much." Then, moved by the young fellow's grief, she laid her hand upon his arm. "Tom," she said, softly, "you'll be sorry for this when you know all."

"Don't touch me," cried Tom, passionately, as he shook her off. "I can't bide it, Daisy. I loved you once, but you threw me over for that bit of a butterfly of a thing."

"Oh, this is too much, and at such a time," cried Daisy. "Here, Jane. Let me go by."

"No," said Tom, catching her wrist, as she made for the interior of the house. "You shall not go to join him again. I'll tak' thee home to thy father."

"Not yet, Tom, not yet. I'm not going to him. Here, Jane, Jane, quick. Where is Mr. Richard?" she cried, as the maid came back.

"Dal thee!" cried Tom, as he threw her arm savagely away. "This before me!"

The girl looked at her and shook her head.

"Where is Mrs. Glaire or Miss Pelly?"

"Out," said the girl, "at Mr. Purley's."

"And Mr. Richard?" cried Daisy, imploringly. "Quick: it is for his good," while Tom, who heard her words, stood gnawing his lips with jealous rage.

"I don't know," said the girl. "He's gone away."

"Oh, this is dreadful," said Daisy, looking bewildered. "Tom, will you not help me? I have been home, and cannot find father or mother. I come here and I cannot find Mr. Richard."

"Howd your tongue, lass, or you'll make me mad," cried Tom. "But Daisy, my bairn, listen," he cried, softening down. "You know I loved you. Come wi' me, 'and I'll find you a home somewheers. You shall never see me again, but I shall know that I've saved you from him."

"Tom, where is my father?" cried Daisy, indignantly.

"Listen to me, Daisy, 'fore it is too late," pleaded the young man. "Let me tak' you away."

"Will you tell me where my poor father is?" cried Daisy again. "If you can't believe in me, I will listen to this shameful talk no more."

"Shameful talk!" said Tom, bitterly.

"Where is my father?"

"Drove mad by his child," cried Tom, speaking now in tones of sorrow. "Gone by this time wi' a lot more to blow up the wucks."

"I won't believe it yet," cried Daisy. "It can't be true. My dear father would never do the like."

"It's true enew," said Tom, "and I should ha' been theer trying once more to stop him, only I see you, and, like a fool, tried to save thee again."

"Tom," cried Daisy, who was giddy with dread and excitement, "tell me that this is some terrible mistake."

"Yes," he said, bitterly; "and I made it."

"What shall I do?" gasped Daisy. "Oh, at last, Mrs. Glaire—Mrs. Glaire, what have you done?"

"You here!" cried Mrs. Glaire, who now entered with Eve from the doctor's, the latter turning pale, and sinking into a chair.

"Yes, yes," gasped Daisy, sinking on her knees, and

clinging to Mrs. Glaire's skirts ; "I came—I was obliged to come back. My father, my———Oh, no, no, no, no!" she sobbed to herself, "I dare not tell them ; I must not tell. I—I—I came——"

"Yes," cried Mrs. Glaire, angrily ; "you came, false, cruel girl. You came back to ruin all our hopes of happiness here—to undo all which I have striven so hard to do."

"But, Mrs. Glaire, dear Mrs. Glaire, I have tried so hard," sobbed Daisy, grovelling on the floor, but still clinging to Mrs. Glaire's dress that she tried to drag away. "You don't know what I've suffered away in that cold, bitter town, wi'out a word from home, wi'out knowing what they thowt o' me, for I kep' my word. I never wrote once, though I was breaking my heart to write."

"But you came back—and now——" cried Mrs. Glaire.

"Yes, yes, I heard—danger—so horrible, I was obliged," panted the girl.

"You heard that?" said Mrs. Glaire.

"Yes, yes," cried Daisy ; "and I came to try and save him fro' it."

"Of course," cried Mrs. Glaire. "Where is your promise?"

"Aunt, aunt," sobbed Eve, "she is fainting. Pray spare her."

"Spare her!" cried Mrs. Glaire. "Why should I? Has she spared us? Go, girl, go ; your presence pollutes this place."

"No, no," cried Daisy. "You mistake me—indeed you do, Mrs. Glaire. I did not come back for what you think."

"Then why did you come?"

"I cannot—dare not tell you ; but where, where, where is Mr. Richard?"

Tom Podmore turned aside, and moved towards the door.

"How dare you ask me," cried Mrs. Glaire, "after the promise you made?"

"Don't ask me that," wailed Daisy, struggling to her

feet, and wringing her hands wildly. "I can't find father. I must see Mr. Richard. Harry said he hadn't left the town. Is he here?"

"No, girl," said Mrs. Glaire, turning away, "he is not here."

"Where is he, then? Oh, Mrs. Glaire!" cried the girl, "for your own sake tell me. On my knees I beg of you to tell me. It is life and death. I came to save. Miss Eve," she cried, turning on her knees to her, "you love him; tell me where he is. I know—yes, I know," she cried, eagerly; "he must be at the works."

Eve started and turned away her head, to bury her face in her hands.

"Yes," cried Daisy, excitedly, "he must be there."

She turned hurriedly to go, when Tom Podmore caught at her cloak.

"Stop!" he cried, excitedly. "You canno' go theer."

Daisy turned upon him angrily, and tore off her cloak, leaving it in his hands as she dashed off through the dark with the young man in pursuit.

"Undone!" moaned Mrs. Glaire. "Undone. Oh, Eve, my poor stricken darling, and after all I have tried!"

"But, aunt, he will not see her. Richard will not—"

"A false, treacherous girl!" moaned Mrs. Glaire. "Eve, my darling, for your sake, for her sake—thank Heaven, here is Dick! Oh, my boy, my darling!"

She threw her arms round him exultingly, as if to hold him, and save him from danger, whilst he threw off the heavy coat in which he was muffled.

"Phew! I'm nearly suffocated," he cried. "There, that will do, mother. Ah! Eve."

"But why did you leave the works, my boy?" cried Mrs. Glaire.

"Sick of it," cried Richard, hastily. "I'll stay there no more. I'll open to-morrow. Curse the place, it's horrible of a night, and I've finished all the wine. What's the matter with Eve?"

"But," cried Mrs. Glaire, evading the question, and speaking excitedly, "you must not stay, Richard; you must leave again to-night—now, at once."

"Where for?" said Richard, grimly.

"London—France—anywhere," exclaimed Mrs. Glaire, piteously.

"Nova Scotia or the North Pole," said Richard, savagely. "D—n it, mother, I won't hide from the curs any more. Here have I been for days in that wretched hole."

"But there's mischief brewing, Dick, my boy, I am sure there is. You must leave at once."

"Let it brew," he cried. "But who was that left the house as I came in?"

Mrs. Glaire did not answer, only looked appealingly to Eve.

"I said who was that came out of the house as I came along—some woman?"

Still there was no answer, and the young man looked eagerly round the hall, to take a step aside, and pounced upon a handkerchief that had been dropped on the mat.

"Whose is this?" he cried, taking it to the light, and holding it out, first to inspect one corner and then another. "Daisy!" he cried, joyously. "Has Daisy been here? Do you hear? Speak, some of you. It was; it must have been. I might have known her in the dark."

"You coward—you villain!" cried Mrs. Glaire, in a low, hissing whisper. "Is there to be no end to your deceit? Stop. One moment. Let me tell you what I know. You planned to meet that girl to-night, and you left your hiding-place on purpose."

"Then it was Daisy!" cried Richard.

"Yes, it was Daisy. You were a little too late. You must have good spies, Richard, my son—clever people, to keep you informed, and you learned that your poor cheated cousin and I were gone out for the evening."

"What the deuce do you mean?" cried Richard, stamping impatiently.

"Mean!" cried his mother. "I mean that I took Daisy away, kept her in Sheffield, that she might be saved from a life of shame—saved—oh, God! that I should have to say it—from my son."

"*You—you* got Daisy away?" half shrieked Richard.

"Yes, I—I," said Mrs. Glaire, "to save you—to make

you an honest man, and that you might keep your word to your poor injured cousin. I did all this to the destruction of the happiness of the most faithful servant that ever served our house, and to break his poor wife's heart. I did all this sin, Richard, for you—for my boy; but you have beaten me; I am defeated. It has been a hard fight, but it was not to be. There, she has been found out by your emissary, that Big Harry."

"Hang me if I know what you are talking about," cried Richard.

"Bah! fool, throw off your disguise," cried Mrs. Glaire. "If you will be a villain, be a bold one, and not a mean, despicable, paltry, cowardly liar. There, go; she has come. Your spies managed well, but they could not foresee that the poor foolish girl would miss you—that you would be a few minutes too late, nor that we should return home early because I was unwell."

"Here, I am not going to stop and hear this mad folly," cried Richard, with his hand upon the door.

"No; go!" cried Mrs. Glaire; "but I curse you."

"Aunt!" shrieked Eve, clinging to her.

"Stand aside, Eve," cried Mrs. Glaire, who was white with passion. "Go—go, Richard. It was Daisy Banks who left here. She came to seek you, and she has gone to find you at the works. Go, my son, go; the road is easy and broad, and if it ends in ruin and death ——"

"Death!" cried Richard, recoiling.

"Yes, death, for there is mischief abroad."

"Bah! I'll hear no more of your mad drivel," cried the young man, savagely. "I've heard too much;" and, flinging open the door, he rushed out.

"Aunt, aunt, what have you done?" cried Eve, piteously.

"Broken my poor weary heart," was the reply, as the stricken woman sank, half-fainting, on the floor.

CHAPTER XLIX.

IN THE WORKS.

As Daisy Banks ran from the house, wild almost with horror and affright, she made straight for the works,

feeling that she might yet be in time to warn Richard Glaire of his peril, if she could not stay her father from the terrible deed he was about to commit.

On encountering Big Harry in the great town, that worthy had, on recovering from his surprise at the meeting, told her all—of the plot formed, and that her father, maddened against Richard Glaire for getting her away, was the man who had joined the Brotherhood, and had undertaken to lay the powder for the destruction of the works.

Yielding to her prayers, the great, honest fellow had agreed to accompany her back; and not a moment had been lost, but on reaching her home her mother was absent, and Joe Banks had been away all day.

Then came the visit to the House, and her leaving for the works.

"Wheer next, lass?" said Harry, coming out of the shadow where he had been waiting, but Daisy brushed by him and was gone.

"See theer now," he muttered. "What, owd Tommy, is that thou?" he cried, as his old friend and fellow-workman, who had in the darkness missed Daisy, ran up.

"Did'st see Daisy Banks?" he cried.

"Yes, I see her. She's gone down the street like a flash o' lightning."

"No, no; she must have gone to the works," cried Tom.

"Then she's gone all round town to get to 'em," said Harry.

"Come and see first," cried Tom, and the two men ran towards the gates.

"What time weer it to be, lad?" whispered Harry.

"I don't know," said Tom, hoarsely; "they've kept that to their sens."

"But owd Joe Banks is going to do it, isn't he?"

"Yes, yes; but come along quick."

They reached the gate, but there was no sign of Daisy Banks; all was closed, and to all appearance the place had not been opened for days.

"Theer, I telled ye so," growled Harry; "she didn't come this waya at all. She's gone home."

"How long would it take us to go?" whispered Tom, who now began to think it possible that Daisy had gone in search of her father.

"Get down theer i' less than ten minutes, lad, back waya," replied Harry; "come along."

Tom tried the gates once more, and then looked down the side alley, but all was still.

"If she has been here, she can't have stayed," he said to himself. "Here, quick, Harry, come on, and we may find Joe Banks, too."

"And if we do, what then?" growled the hammerman.

"We must stop him—hold him—tie his hands—owt to stay him fro' doing this job."

"I'm wi' ye, lad," said Harry; "he'll say thanky efterward. If I get a good grip o' him he wean't want no bands."

The two men started off at a race, and as they disappeared Daisy crept out of the opposite doorway, where she had been crouching down, and then tried the gates.

All fast, and she dare not ring the big bell, but stood listening for a moment or two, and then ran swiftly along the wall, and down the side alley to the door that admitted to the counting-house—the alley where her interview with Richard Glaire had been interrupted by the coming of Tom Podmore.

She reached the door, and tried the handle, giving it a push, when, to her great joy, she found it yield, and strung up to the pitch of doing anything by her intense excitement, she stepped into the dark entry, the door swinging to behind her, and she heard it catch.

Then for a few minutes she stood still, holding her hand to her heart, which was beating furiously. At last, feeling that she must act, she felt her way along the wall to the counting-house door, looking in to find all still and dark, and then she cried in a low voice, "Father—Mr. Richard—are you here?"

No response, and she went to the door leading into the yard, to find it wide open and all without in the great place perfectly still and dark, while the great heaps of old metal and curiously-shaped moulds and patterns could just be made out in the gloom.

A strange feeling of fear oppressed her, but she fought it back bravely, and went on, avoiding the rough masses in the path, and going straight to the chief door of the great works.

The place was perfectly familiar to her, for she had as a child often brought her father's dinner, and been taken to see the engines, furnaces, and large lathes, with the other weird-looking pieces of machinery, which in those days had to her young eyes a menacing aspect, and seemed as if ready to seize and destroy the little body that crept so cautiously along.

Entering the place then bravely, she went on through the darkness, with outstretched hands, calling softly again and again the name of Richard Glaire or her father. Several times, in spite of her precautions, she struck herself violently against pieces of metal that lay about, or came in contact with machinery or brickwork; but she forgot the pain in the eagerness of her pursuit till she had convinced herself that no one could be on the basement floor.

Then seeking the steps, she proceeded to the floor above, calling in a low whisper from time to time as she went on between the benches, and past the little window that looked down on the alley, which had afforded Sim Slee a means of entry when the bands were destroyed.

No one on this floor; and with a shiver, begotten of cold and dread, she proceeded to the steps leading to the next floor, which she searched in turn, ending by going to the third—a repetition of those below.

"There is no one here," she said to herself at last; "unless he is asleep."

She shuddered at this; and now, with the chilly feeling growing stronger each moment, she made her way amongst the benches and wood-work of this place, which was the pattern shop, and reached the top of the stairs, where she paused; and then, not satisfied, feeling that this was the most likely place for a man to be in hiding, she went over this upper floor again.

As she searched, the clock at the church struck eleven, and its tones sent a thrill through her, they sounded so solemn; but directly after, with the tears falling fast, as the old clock bell brought up happy recollections of the

past, she began to descend; but was not half-way down before she heard footsteps, and her name pronounced in an eager whisper—

"Daisy—Daisy!"

She stopped short, trembling with dread. It was Richard Glaire, the man who had had such influence over her, and whom she had told herself that she loved so well. But this feeling of fear that she suffered now could not be love; she knew that well; and during her late seclusion she had learned to look upon the young man's actions in a new light. His mother's words to her had taken root, and she knew now that his intentions towards her had only been to make her the plaything of the hour of his fleeting liking; and the girl's face flushed, and her teeth were set, as once again she asked herself why had she been so weak and vain as to believe this man.

"Daisy—Daisy—Daisy Banks, are you here?" came in a loud whisper; and still she did not move, but her heart fluttered, and her breath was drawn painfully.

No; she did not care for him now, she felt. It was a dream—a silly love dream, and she had awakened a wiser, stronger girl than she was before.

"Stronger!" she thought; "and yet I stand here afraid to speak, afraid to move, when I have come to save him perhaps from a horrible death. I will speak."

She stopped again, for a terrible thought oppressed her. She must not betray her father. He might even now be coming to the place, if it was true that he was to blow up the works—he might even now be here, and the explosion—Oh! it was too horrible; she dared not speak even now: she dared not stay. She was not so brave as she thought, and she must fly from the place, or try to meet her father. Not Richard Glaire; she could not—dare not meet him again; for she feared him still, even though she told herself that she was strong. A strange feeling of faintness came over her, all seemed to swim round—and had she not clutched at the handrail, her feelings would have been too much for her, and she would have fallen headlong to the foot of the steep flight.

As it was, she uttered a faint cry, and it betrayed her presence.

"I knew you were here," cried Richard Glaire, hurriedly ascending the stairs; "why, Daisy, my little bird, at last—at last. Where have you been?"

"Then you are safe yet," she gasped, as he caught her in his arms, though she repulsed him.

"Safe; yes, my little beauty. I found you had been at the house, and they said you were here—come to look for me. Why, Daisy, this meeting makes up for all my misery since you have been gone."

Daisy wrenched herself from his arms, exclaiming passionately—

"I came to save you, and others, Mr. Glaire, and you act like this. Quick, get away from this place. Your life is in danger."

"I have heard that tale, my dear," he said, "till I am tired of it."

"I tell you," cried Daisy, as he tried to clasp her again, and she struggled with him; "I tell you there is a plot against you, and that you must go. This place is not safe. You have not a moment to lose."

"Why," said Richard, holding her in spite of her struggles; "did you not come to see me and comfort me for being in hiding here?"

"No, no," cried Daisy, trying to free herself; "I came to warn you. Oh, sir, this is cowardly."

"Come, Daisy, my little one, why are you struggling? You used not."

"No," cried the girl, angrily; "not when I was a silly child and believed you."

"Come, that's unkind," said Richard, laughing. "Where have you been, eh? But there, I know."

"I tell you, Mr. Richard, you are in danger."

"Pooh! what danger? We're safe enough here, Daisy, and no one will interrupt us."

"I cannot answer questions," said Daisy. "Oh, pray, pray let us go. I came to save you."

"Then you do love me still, Daisy?"

"No, no; indeed no, sir, I hate you; but I would not see you hurt."

"Look here, Daisy," cried Richard. "I hate mystery. Did you come here alone?"

"Yes, yes—to save you."

"Thank you, my dear; but now, please tell me why? No mystery, please, or I shall think this is some trick, and that you have been sent by the men on strike."

"Indeed, no, Mr. Richard," cried Daisy, who, in her horror, caught at his arm, and tried to drag him away. "Mr. Richard, sir, you told me you loved me; and in those days I was foolish enough to believe you, to the neglect of a good, true man, who wanted to make me his wife."

"Poor idiot!" cried Richard, who was getting out of temper at being so kept at a distance.

"No; but a good, true man," cried Daisy, indignantly. "I've wakened up from the silly dream you taught me to believe, and now I come to warn you of a great danger, and you scoff at it."

"What's the danger, little one?"

"I cannot—dare not tell you."

"Then it isn't true. It's an excuse of yours. The old game, Daisy: all promises and love in your letters—all coyness and distance when we meet; but you are not going to fool me any more, my darling. I don't believe a word of your plot, for no one knows I am here except those who would not betray me."

"What shall I do?" cried Daisy, clasping her hands in agony. "Even now it may be too late."

"What shall you do, you silly little thing!" cried Richard, whose promises were all forgotten, and he clasped Daisy more tightly; "why, behave like a sensible girl. Why, Daisy, I have not kissed you for weeks, and so must make up for lost time."

"If you do not loose me, Mr. Richard, I shall scream for help," cried the girl, now growing frightened.

"And who's to hear you if you do?" he said, mockingly.

"Those who are coming to destroy your works," exclaimed Daisy, now fully roused to the peril of her position.

"Let them come!" cried Richard, as he held her more tightly; "when they do," he added, with a laugh, "I'll let you go."

He was drawing Daisy's face round to his in spite of her struggles, when, in an instant, she ceased to fight against him, as she exclaimed in a low, awe-stricken whisper—

"Hush! what was that?"

Richard loosed his hold on the instant, and stood listening.

"Nothing but a trick of yours, Miss Daisy," he cried, catching her arm as she was gliding from him into the darkness.

"Hush! there it is again," whispered the girl. "I heard it plainly. Pray, pray, let us go."

"No one can have got in here," muttered Richard, turning pale, for this time he had distinctly heard some sound from below. "Here, wait a moment, and I'll go and see."

"No, no," faltered Daisy. "Not alone; and you must not leave me. There is danger—there is, indeed, Mr. Richard."

"Give me your hand, then," he whispered. "Curse the place; it's dark enough by night to frighten any one. Mind how you come."

Daisy clung convulsively to his hand and arm, as they descended to the second floor, where all seemed to be still, not a sound reaching their ears; and from thence to the first floor, where all was as they had left it.

Here Richard paused for a few moments, but could hear nothing but the beating of their own hearts, for now he, too, was horribly alarmed.

"It's nothing," he said at last. "Daisy, you've been inventing this to make me let you go."

Daisy made no reply, for the horror of some impending evil seemed to be upon her, and with her lips parched, and tongue dry, she could not even utter a word; but clung to him, and tried to urge him away.

"Come along, then, into the counting-house," he said, infected now by the girl's manifest fears. "Mind how you come; the steps are worn. Take care."

But for his arm Daisy would probably have fallen, but he aided her, and she reached the floor in safety.

"Stop a moment, silly child," he said, "and I'll light a

match, just to look round and show you that you are frightened at nothing."

"No, no," gasped Daisy. "Quick, quick, the door."

"Well, then, little one, just to prevent our breaking our necks over this cursed machinery."

"No, no," moaned Daisy. "I know the way. Here, quick."

But Richard was already striking the wax match he had taken from a box, and then as the light blazed up he uttered a cry of horror, and let it fall, while Daisy, who took in at a glance the horror of their situation, sank beside the burning match, which blazed for a few moments on the beaten earth, and then went out, leaving them in a darkness greater than before.

CHAPTER L.

A LATE RECOGNITION.

As Richard Glaire followed Daisy Banks and reached the works, he made for the great gates, took a rapid glance up and down the dark street to see that it was quite forsaken, and then slipped a latch-key in the wicket, which yielded quietly, and he passed in.

"Will she be here?" he said, and then it struck him suddenly that it was impossible: the works had been closely shut up.

"But she came here—to find me. Perhaps she has Joe Banks's key," he exclaimed. "At all events I'll have a look."

He crossed the yard, entered the great pile of buildings, and listened; then returning, he went to the counting-house, and through the passage to the dark opening into the alley, to find it on the latch.

"She is here," he exclaimed, joyously; and leaving it as it was, he proceeded to the great building, and then began to peer about in the darkness and listen, ending by seeking the first ladder leading to the half-floor.

"She's playing with me," he said, half laughing. "She's a plucky little thing, though, to come here by herself;" and then he ascended, and stopped at one of the

windows looking towards the town to listen, but all seemed still.

He had hardly placed his foot on the second flight of stairs, and begun to ascend, when the light of a bull's-eye lantern was flashed all over the foundry.

"Dark as Jonah's sea-parlour, my lad," said a voice. "Come along, all of you," and several men, who had entered by the counting-house door, and then gone back to fetch something, came silently into the great gloomy place.

They were evidently in their stocking feet, and moved about without a sound, two of them being dimly seen by the lantern light to be carrying small kegs.

"Be keerful wi' that lantern, Barker," said the first speaker, who had evidently been drinking.

"Yes, I'm careful enough," said the man; "but these nails and bits of metal are dreadful to the feet."

"He, he, he!" laughed Slee, "we shall clear all them away soon. I'm glad I comed. I'm not the man to stay away when theer's a job o' this sort on. Look alive, Stocktle."

"I'm looking alive enew," said one of the men with the kegs; "but it seems a burning shame to spoil the owd place wheer we've made so many honest shillings."

"None o' your snivelling, Joe Stocktle," exclaimed Sim Slee. "Don't you come powering your warm watter on the powther. Is the place a-bringing you money now, or starving your missus and the bairns?"

"That's a true word," said the man, sulkily; and he placed his keg on the earth, beside one of the thick furnace walls, as Joe Banks, without another word, placed his there too, right in the centre of the building, where the great wall went up as a support to the various floors, close to the huge chimney-shaft, which was continued up a couple of hundred feet above the building.

"It'll send the owd shaft down, too," said Sim; "and if we're lucky, the place 'll catch fire and blaze like owt."

"Pray be quick, my lads; and we'd better go now," whispered Barker. "Hush! wasn't that a noise?"

"On'y an owd tom cat," said Slee. "He lives here,

and scared me finely when I came for the bands. Yow can do wi'out us now, Joe Banks?"

"Wait a moment," said the foreman, slowly. "Get me a crowbar off yon bench."

Slee fetched the tool, taking the light with him, and casting weird shadows about the vast foundry, as he carried the lantern, and made its light flicker about. Then returning, he stood looking on, and holding the light, his hand trembling as he lighted Joe Banks, while he and the man called Stocktle loosed the top hoops, and wrenched out the heads of the kegs with a recklessness that made Barker's blood run cold, and he, too, shivered so that his teeth chattered.

"Seems a shame to blow up t'owd shop," said Stocktle, again. "Must do it, I s'pose."

"Of course you must, you maulkin," whispered Slee. "Theere's all the lads hinging about the market-place to see 'em go up. Now, Joe Banks, tak' this lantern. You knows what to do. Here's the fuse. Shove it in your pocket. Wait till we've gone, then upset both kegs, and then make a good long train right to the door, wheer you'll put your fuse into ground, with a handful o' powther at the end. Open the lantern, and howd fuse to it a moment, shoot lantern up, and if fuse is well leeted, coot off as hard as you can. Here's the pot. Half fill un, so as to lay a long train."

Joe Banks took the small watering-can handed to him, and proceeded to half fill it from one of the kegs, trying it afterwards, to see if the black grains poured freely from the spout; and finding they did, he set it down.

"Pray come along," whispered Barker.

"I'm wi' you," said Slee; and he followed Barker hastily, the two men making for the counting-house door.

"Tak' care o' yoursen, Joe Banks," said the man left behind. "Shall I stop and help you? Them two's coot awaya."

"No; go after them," said the foreman, speaking almost for the first time.

"Raight," said Stocktle. "On'y look out for yoursen, owd Guy Fox, and don't get blowed up too. Are you all raight?"

"Yes," was the reply; and the man glided silently amongst the furnaces into the darkness, leaving the stern grey-headed man to his dark task.

He was quick over it, tilting and half emptying the kegs against the wall; and then, with the pot in one hand, the lantern in the other, he made a path of light along the floor, in which he trickled down a black zigzag pattern for many yards, till the pot was nearly empty, when he poured all the rest in a patch, took out the long black fuse, laid one end in the powder, and drew out the other, ready to thrust in the lantern.

"It's a mean, cowardly trick," muttered Banks, darkening the lantern as he put down the pot and stood erect. "What would my owd brother workman say if he could see me now? Ay, and what would he say to his black-hearted son for robbing me of all I howd dear? It's a judgment on him, and he deserves it. Ay, but it's not like me to do such a thing; but I've said I'd do it, and I will. Who's yon? Curse him; I wish it were Dick Glaire, and I'd fire the train at once if I died wi' him."

The foreman stood ready, as he heard whispers and descending steps, and ground his teeth together, as he made out that there was a woman's voice as well as a man's.

"It might be Richard Glaire," he muttered, "and who will it be wi' him?"

He stood listening again, feeling in his mad excitement neither fear of detection nor death, for his sole desire was to obtain one great sweeping revenge on the man whom he now hated with a deadly hate; and as he listened the thought grew more strongly that this must be Richard holding a meeting with Eve Pelly.

"It can be no one else," he muttered, pressing his hands to his fevered head, and then stooping to feel the fuse and powder. "I don't want to hurt her, poor lass, but she's an enemy now, like her scoundrel o' a cousin. A villain! a villain! He's forsaken my poor bairn, then, to come back here and mak' love to she. If I shrunk from it before, I feel strong now. But I'll be sure first, for mad as I am again him, I wouldn't send an

innocent man to his account. But it must be him, it must be him, sent by his fate to die in the midst of his place."

Joe Banks stood trying to think, but he was in so excited and fevered a state that the effort was vain. He could see nothing but ruin and death. He had promised to fire the train, and he was ready to do it, for passion had long usurped reason, and should he die in the ruins, he cared but little.

Meantime, as he stood intently listening, and with his hand upon the catch of his lantern, ready to apply it to the fuse at any moment, the whisperings continued, ceased within a few yards of where he stood; and then came the sound of a box being opened. There was a sharp, crackling scratch, and a tiny white flame flashed out in the midst of the darkness.

It lasted but a few moments, for Richard uttered a cry of dread, and let it fall, but in those moments Joe Banks had seen who struck the match, and that a female companion had sunk fainting to the earth, and the hot rage, that had almost turned his brain, grew ten times hotter.

"You madman!" cried Richard, who had divined what was to take place; and in his dread he became for the time brave, and sought to grasp the man who was charged with the deadly design. "You madman!" he cried. "What are you about to do? Here, help!"

He sought to grasp the foreman, and had not long to wait, for, choking with rage, the injured man stepped forward to seize him in turn, and they closed in a furious struggle, which resulted in the younger man seeming like a child in the mighty arms of his adversary, who lifted him from the ground, dashed him down, and then, panting with exertion and rage, planted a foot upon his chest and held him there close by the end of the train, while he felt round for the dark lantern he had dropped.

"Banks, Joe Banks, are you mad?" cried Richard, who was half stifled by the pressure upon his breast.

"Yes," said the foreman, grimly; "mad."

"What are you going to do?" panted Richard, struggling to remove the foot.

"To do, liar, coward, villain! was it not enew that you had all you could want, but you must come and rob me o' my poor bairn?"

"Joe—Joe Banks," panted Richard, in protestation; but his words were stifled, for the maddened man pressed his foot down more firmly on his chest.

"Silence, you villain!" cried Banks, in a low fierce whisper, "or I'll crash in your chest or break your skull with a piece of iron. Are you going to marry that Eve Pelly?"

"Yes, Joe, yes; but——"

"Silence!" hissed the foreman, "unless you want to say your prayers. Speak a word aloud, and I'll kill you dead. Now, you want to know why I'm here? I'll tell you. The poor lads thrown out o' work by your cruel ways said they'd blow up the works, for you had injured them so that they would have revenge; and then I said I had greater wrong to bear, and I would do it. Do you want to know more?" he continued, with a savage chuckle. "There lies the powther all of a heap, two barrels full, and here's the train down by your feet. It's aw ready, and there would have been no works by this time if you had not come with she."

"Joe, listen," panted Richard, struggling ineffectually against the pressure.

"Silence!" hissed Banks; and his foot was pressed so savagely down that Richard Glaire thought his end had come, and lay half swooning, with dazzling lights dancing before his eyes, the sound of bells ringing in his ears, and a horrible dread upon him that if he spoke again the words would be his last. And all this time, like a low hissing sentence of death, went on the words of the foreman, as he bent over him.

"I tell thee I hev but to put the light to the train, and you——. Yes, we shall be blown into eternity unless I run fro' the place."

"Your child — Daisy," panted Richard, in his horror.

"I hev no bairn," cried Banks, who then uttered an ejaculation indicative of satisfaction, for he had been feeling about, and reached the lantern.

"Banks, Joe Banks, for mercy's sake," groaned Richard, hoarsely, "I'm not fit to die."

"Nay, thou'rt not, and thou'lt be worse if I let thee live, and if thou survives that poor lass will lead a living death."

"Joe—mercy!" cried Richard, as the pressure on his breast increased.

"Ask it fro' up yonder," said the foreman, solemnly. "I'll gi'e you two minutes to pray while the fuse burns. It'll last two minutes; see, lad."

"Joe, Joe," panted his victim, feebly struggling as against some horrible nightmare, while with starting eyeballs he glared up at the weird, distorted face of his foreman, upon which the light shone strangely as he opened the lantern door, held it to the fuse for a moment, closed it, and hurled it to the other side of the foundry, while the slow match began to burn gradually towards the powder.

"He's mad, he's mad!" moaned Richard, gazing hard with a feeling of horrible fascination at the burning fuse, whose faint sparkling light made the face of Banks look to him like that of some demon. "Joe, for my father's sake!"

"Not for his. Yo' canno' be your father's bairn."

"Joe, for Daisy's sake," panted Richard, again. "Mercy, mercy! it has nearly burned out."

"Pray, fool, pray," hissed Banks. "I may save you from the curse I give you for blasting my home. I wean't run. Let it go, for thou'rt sent here to-night to die. It's God's vengeance on you for what you've done. See, the powther catches."

"It's devil's work, not God's!" shrieked Richard, as, grasping the foot that pressed him down, he made a final effort for life, just as the train caught fire, flashed up, and began to run in a serpentine course towards the barrels.

Another moment and it would have been too late. As it was, Joe Banks took a couple of strides, and swept the powder aside in the middle of the train, so that when the lurid serpent that seemed running its wavy course along the floor, lighting up the works with a strange glow,

reached its maker's foot, it fluttered, sparkled here and there to right and left, and then all was darkness.

"You're raight," said Banks, solemnly, from out of the darkness, while, half blinded by the glare, Richard feebly struggled to his knees, and crouched there, bathed in a chilly sweat. "You're raight; it is devil's work, and I canno' do it. Richard Glaire, I believe I'm mad; and when I found you here, wi' her as lies theer moaning, I said we'd all die together."

"This is horrible, horrible!" moaned Richard.

"Mebbe it is," said Banks, sadly; "but for you, lad, the bitterness o' death is past. It's devil's work, indeed, and it shall not be mine. Get up, and tak' yon poor lass away, lest the fit comes ower me again, and I forget as I'm a man."

Richard groaned, for he was weak and helpless as a babe.

"I give you your life before," continued Banks, moving to where a dim light showed where the lantern lay, and returning with it open, so that its glow shone upon Richard Glaire's white face. "I give it to you again, man. Go, and God forgive you what you've done to me."

Richard made an effort to rise, and stood tottering on his feet, speechless with the reaction from the horror through which he had passed, while Banks crossed to where Daisy was beginning to recover from her swoon.

"Poor bairn!" he said, softly; "and I should ha' slain thee too. Get up, Miss Eve, and some day you may pray for and forgive me."

He turned the light full upon her as she rose to her knees, then covered her eyes, for the light dazzled her.

"Where am I?" she cried; then, as recollection flashed back, she started up with a cry of "Father—father!"

Joe Banks stood motionless for a few moments, staring wildly at what seemed to him like some horrible vision; and it was not until Daisy rose to her feet that he fully realised what he had so nearly achieved; then the lantern dropped from his hand; he clasped his temples with

his sinewy hands, and uttered a hoarse cry that echoed through the gloomy place—

"My God!"

As the words left his lips he turned slightly, and fell heavily upon the ground, just as there were shouts, the rush of feet; and, bearing lights, a couple of policemen, Tom, Harry, and about a dozen of the tradespeople, headed by the vicar, rushed into the place.

CHAPTER LI.

A PERIL PAST.

"Thank Heaven, we're in time," exclaimed the vicar. "Back, every man with lights," he shouted; "there's a train."

There was a rush back for the entrance, but the vicar stood firm, and taking one of the policemen's lanterns, he cautiously stepped forward, tracing the train, and scattering it with his feet till he saw the heap that had trickled from the opened kegs.

"Keep your places with the lights," he cried. "Harry! Tom! buckets of water, quick!"

Half a dozen started for the yard, where there was a large iron tank outside the door, and bucketsful were brought in rapidly, with which, while the vicar lighted them, Tom and Harry deluged the heap of powder.

"There's no danger now," said the vicar, as the ground was saturated in every direction. "Good heavens! what a diabolical attempt!"

And not till now was attention drawn to Richard Glaire, who sat upon a block of metal, watching the actions of those around him, as their lights feebly illumined the great gloomy place. He was white as ashes, trembling as if stricken with the palsy; and when spoken to stared vacantly at the vicar.

"Are you hurt, Mr. Glaire?" he said, kindly.

For answer, Richard burst into an hysterical fit of sobbing, and cried like a child.

"Fetch a little brandy, some one," said the vicar. "He will be better after this. He must have had some terrible shock. Who is this?" he continued, directing

his light to where Banks lay insensible, with the blood trickling from a cut upon his forehead, where he had struck it against a rough piece of slag in falling.

"It's Joe Banks," growled Harry, as the vicar knelt down and quickly bandaged the wound.

At the moment Daisy, who had remained crouching behind the brickwork of one of the furnaces, came forward trembling.

"Daisy Banks!" cried the vicar, in astonishment. "You here?"

"Don't speak to me; don't speak to me," she cried, wildly, as she threw herself sobbing beside her father to passionately raise his head, and kiss him again and again. "He's dead, he's dead, and I've killed—I've killed him."

There was silence for a few moments, which no one cared to break, and Tom Podmore stood with folded arms and heaving breast, gazing down at the weeping figure of her he so dearly loved.

"He's not dead, my poor girl," said the vicar, kindly; "only in a swoon. That bleeding will do him good. Constables, we must get him home at once, or—no, you must guard this place. Harry, Podmore, and two more—a stout piece of carpet from the nearest house. We can carry him in that."

"Bring him home—to my place," said Richard Glaire, who had somewhat recovered.

"I think not, Mr. Glaire," said the vicar, firmly. "His own house will be best."

"Excuse me, sir," said the chief policeman. "He's the leader, I believe; we must have him at the station. The doctor can see him there. He had laid the train, and was to fire it. Harry and Podmore here know."

Daisy uttered a shriek, and the vicar's brow knit as he turned to Richard.

"It's a lie," cried the latter, sharply. "I was here, and know some scoundrels put the powder here, and the train; but Banks destroyed it, and saved my life."

The vicar had him by the hand in a moment, and pressed it hard.

"It's a lie, parson," he said in a whisper; "but I must tell it. He did save my life."

"How came he by that cut, then, sir?" said the policeman.

"You see," said Richard, coldly, "he fell and struck himself against that piece of clinker. He did not know I was there, and that his child had come to warn him, and he was overcome."

"I will be answerable for his appearance to reply to any charge," said the vicar.

"There's no charge against him," said Richard, hastily. "I saw him destroy the train."

Daisy crept to his side, and Tom Podmore groaned as he saw her kiss Richard's hand.

"Very good, sir," said the constable; "that will do. We'll watch here, sir, though there's no fear now; and the others are locked up."

A piece of carpet was then fetched, and Banks was carefully lifted upon it, four men taking the corners, and bearing him hammock-fashion down the crowded street, the work-people who had been in the street having been augmented by the rest; and a strange silence brooded over the place as they talked in whispers, the story growing every instant until it was the common report that Banks and Richard Glaire had met in the foundry, that Banks had been killed, and Richard Glaire was now dying at home.

The gossiping people could not fit Daisy Banks into the story. She was walking beside her stricken father, and they saw her bent head, and heard her bitter sobs; but it was only natural that she should make her appearance at such a time, and it seemed nothing to them that she should be close to Tom Podmore, who was one of the bearers, though he, poor fellow, winced, as Daisy half-clung to his arm for protection, when the crowd pressed upon them more than once.

On reaching the cottage, the vicar hurried in first, to prepare Mrs. Banks, expecting a burst of lamentation; but as soon as he had uttered his first words, Mrs. Banks was cold and firm as a stone.

"Is he dead, sir?" she whispered; "tell me true."

"No, no; and not much injured. I think it is a fit."

"I wean't give way, sir," she panted; and running up-

stairs, she began to drag down a mattress and pillow, ready for the suffering man.

"Poor Joe, poor Joe!" she murmured, and then gave a start as she heard the word "Mother!"

"Ay, lass, I'd forgot thee in this new trouble."

"But you will not send me away, mother?" whispered Daisy—"wait till you know all."

"I send thee away, lass? Nay, nay, I shouldna do that now," said Mrs. Banks, sadly.

The next moment she was putting the pillow and arranging it beneath her husband's head, as he was borne in, the men softly retiring, and giving place to the doctor, who hurried in, hot and panting.

"Ah, Selwood, what's all this?" he said. "Give me a light quickly."

He was down on his knees directly, examining his patient, removing the bandage, and looking at the cut, the patient's eyes, and carefully loosening all tight clothing.

"Poor fellow!—ah—yes—nasty cut—do him good. Hum! What fools people are; they told me he was killed."

"Will he live, Mr. Purley?" whispered Daisy, hoarsely.

"Ah, Daisy, you come back?" said the doctor. "Live? yes, of course he will. Touch of apoplexy; but we'll bring him round."

"Oh, mother, mother!" moaned Daisy; "I thought I'd killed him;" and she threw herself, sobbing, into her mother's arms.

"Come, come, that won't do," exclaimed the doctor. "You two must help me. Selwood, you'll do me a good turn by going, and taking all the people with you. We want fresh air."

The vicar nodded, and a few words from him, coupled with the information that Banks was not seriously hurt and would soon recover, sufficed to send the little crowd away.

They followed him, though at a distance, Tom Podmore and Harry acting as his rearguard, as he made as if to go straight to the House.

He had to pass the Bull, though; and seeing a group of people there, he made his way through them to where Robinson, the landlord, was standing discussing the events of the evening.

"Robinson," said the vicar, aloud, and his words were listened to eagerly, "I'm afraid this atrocious outrage was hatched here in your house."

"'Strue as I stand here, sir," cried the landlord, eagerly, "I knowed nowt of it."

"But you knew that secret meetings were held here?"

"I knowd they'd their meetings, and a lot o' flags and nonsense, sir; but I niver thowt it was owt but foolery, or they shouldn't hev had it here."

"I ask you as a man, Robinson, did you know they meant to blow up the works?"

"No, Mr. Selwood," cried Robinson, indignantly; "and if I had knowed I'd have come and telled you directly."

"I believe you," said the vicar.

"I knowed they talked big, sir," continued Robinson; "but when men do that ower a pipe and a gill o' ale, it's on'y so much blowing off steam like, and does 'em good. Bud look here, sir, there's about a dozen of 'em up in big room now. Come on up, and we'll drift 'em."

He led the way to the club-room, to find it locked on the inside, and on knocking he was asked the pass-word.

"Dal thee silly foolery," cried the landlord, in a passion, "there it is;" and, stepping back a few paces, he ran furiously at the door and dashed it off its hinges; entering, followed by the vicar, Harry, and Tom, who kept close to protect him from harm.

There were about fourteen men present, and they rose with more of dread than menace in their aspect, half expecting to see the police.

"Look here, lads," began the landlord—

"Allow me, Mr. Robinson," said the vicar, stepping forward and looking straight before him. "My men, I look at no man here; I recognise no man as I say this. Smarting under injury as you thought——"

"Real injury, parson," cried Stockton.

"Faults on both sides, my man," continued the vicar.

"Some among you destroyed Mr. Glaire's property. I say, smarting under your injuries, and led away by some foolish, mouthing demagogues, you conspired to take the law into your own hands, and, not content with making two cruel assaults on your employer——"

"Which he well deserved, parson."

"I cannot enter into that," said the vicar. "If one man does wrong, it is no excuse for the wrong of others. Our salutary laws will protect even a murderer, and then punish him according to his deserts. But listen—in a few words, you have been led away to conspire for the accomplishment of a most dastardly outrage. I have just come from the works, and I tell you, as a man, that if the scheme had succeeded, they would have been destroyed."

"Serve him right," growled a voice.

"All the houses round would have been injured, and the loss of life would have been frightful."

"Nay, nay, parson," said Stockton.

"I am giving you my honest conviction, my men," continued the vicar. "A hundred pounds of powder in a confined space is sufficient to commit awful ravages; and you forget what would have followed if that tremendous chimney had fallen. But I have not told you all. If the powder had been fired, three people in the works would have been killed. Those people were Mr. Richard Glaire——"

"Weer he theer, sir?" exclaimed Stockton.

"He was," said the vicar; "he has been in hiding there from your violence for days. I knew some plot was hatching, and, to save both him and you, I advised his staying in the works, so that you might think he had left the town."

"Which we did," muttered two or three.

"I shudder when I think of the consequences of my advice. But listen—there would have been two more horribly mutilated and shattered corpses at this moment—the remains of your foreman and his poor child, Daisy Banks."

"Oh, coom, parson!" said Stockton.

"I tell you, man, as I rushed in, they were all three there. How they came there together I do not know.

I do not want to know. All I know is that it has pleased God to spare us from a sin for which we should never have forgiven ourselves."

"I don't see as yow had much to do wi' it, parson," said a voice, sneeringly.

"My men, my men," cried the vicar, in a deeply moved voice, "do you think I live here among you without feeling that your joys and sorrows are mine? and your sins are mine as well, for I ought to have taught you better. For God's sake let us have no more of these wretched meetings; break up your society, and act as man to man. Suffer to be strong. Have forbearance, and try to end these dreadful strikes, which fall not on you, but on your wives and children."

"But what call hev you got to interfere?" cried a surly voice.

"Howd hard theer," cried Stockton; "parson's i' the raight. He's spent three hundred pound, if he's spent a penny, over them as was 'most pined to dead."

"That's raight," cried several voices.

"Never mind that, my men; it was my duty, even as it is to be the friend and brother of all who are here. But listen——"

"I didn't come to hear parson preach," cried a voice.

"One word—listen to me for your own sakes," cried the vicar, in impassioned tones. "Suppose you had succeeded without the horrible loss of life that must have occurred through your ignorance of the force of powder—suppose the works had been, with all the costly machinery, turned into a heap of ruins?"

"It would hev sarved Richard Glaire well raight," said some one.

"Grant that it would, but what then, my lads? For Heaven's sake look a little further than the satisfaction of a paltry, unmanly desire for revenge."

"It would hev ruined Dicky Glaire," cried Stockton.

"Yes, my men; but it would have ruined you as well. Those works could not have been restored for years: perhaps never; the trade would have gone elsewhere, and, as I take it, over two hundred men and their wives and children must have gone elsewhere for bread."

"That's raight enew, parson," cried Stockton; "but all the same if some cursed, cowardly spy hadn't betrayed us the wucks would hev been down."

"That betrayal of your evil plans came about more strangely than you can imagine," said the vicar. "I have suspected something, and been constantly on the watch."

"Strange and kind of you, too, parson," said Stockton, with a laugh.

"You will think so some day, my man."

"Bud I know who it weer," said Stockton. "Theer he stands; it were Tom Podmore. He weer not sweered in."

"Then he did not betray you," said the vicar, as a menacing growl arose; but Tom stood perfectly firm.

"No, it weern't Tom Podmore," cried Big Harry, stalking forward, one big shoulder at a time. "If you want to know who did it, here he is—I did; and I'm glad on it. Dal me! I'm glad as th'owd wucks aint down, and I'll faight any two o' you as don't like it; so now then."

There was another growl, but no one took up the challenge.

"See here, lads," cried Harry. "I went awaya so as to hev now't to do wi' it, and I didn't tell anybody; only telled parson to give Dicky Glaire the word to look out."

"And you was sweered in, Harry," cried Stockton.

"So I weer," said the big fellow; "and as I said afore, I'll faight any man as don't like it. Well, I goes on to Sheffle to get wuck, and there I happened o' Daisy Banks; and when the poor little lass got howd o' me, and begged me to tell all about her owd man, why dal me, I weer obliged to tell her how he was a-going to——dal it, parson, don't slap a man o' the mooth that how."

"You've said enough, Harry," cried the vicar. "We want to know no more. I answer for you that you did quite right, and some day these men will thank you, as I do now, for saving us all from this horror. Now, my men, you know that Slee and Barker, that stranger, are in the station."

"Oh, ay, we know that," said Stockton; "and I vote, lads, we hev 'em out."

"No, no; let them get the punishment they deserve," cried the vicar.

"Well, lookye here, parson," cried Stockton; "the game's up, I s'pose, and you've got the police outside. I was in it, and I'm not going to turn tail. Here I am."

"My man, I will not know your name, nor the name of any man here. I will not recognise anybody; I came as your friend, not as a spy. I came to ask you to break up your wretched bond of union, and to go forth home as honest men. Where a union is made for the fair protection of a workman's rights, I can respect it; but a brotherhood that blasphemes its own name by engaging in what may prove wholesale murder, is a monster that you yourselves must crush. I have no more to say. Go home."

"Parson's raight, lads!" said Stockton, throwing off his defiant air. "Let's go. Parson, it was a damned cowardly trick, but Dicky Glaire had made us strange and mad."

"It weer owd Simmy Slee as made it wuss, wi' cootting o' them bands," said Big Harry. "We should ha' been at wuck again if it hadn't been for that."

"Quick, lads!" cried a man, running in. "Sim Slee and Barker's broke out o' th'owd shop, and the police are coming down here."

"Theer, parson," said Stockton, with a bitter smile; "th' game's oop."

For answer the vicar pointed to the windows, and in less than a minute the room was empty, though there would have been plenty of time to escape by the door, for the one policeman coming on the mission to see if Slee had made for the meeting-place of his party did not hurry his footsteps, partly from reasons of dignity, and partly because he was alone.

CHAPTER LII.

A FAITHFUL LOVER.

THE announcement was quite correct. Sim Slee and his companions had broken away through the ceiling, dis-

lodged the tiles, and escaped ; and when the vicar reached home, he found Mrs. Slee waiting up for him, trembling and pale, while her eyes were red with weeping. She clung to him hysterically, and asked if the news was true, and that her husband was in prison.

"They came and told me the police had got him," she sobbed. "Ah, he's a bad one sometimes, but he's my maister, sir, he's my maister."

"He was taken, Mrs. Slee," said the vicar, "I'm sorry to say. I was present. You know I went out to-night, for I was in dread of some outrage; and after being about a time, I found that something was wrong, for the men were all waiting as in expectation."

"He always would mix himself up with these troubles i'stead o' wucking," sobbed the poor woman.

"Fortunately I met two of the men I could trust, and found that an attempt was to be made to blow up the works."

"Ah, but Sim wouldn't do that, sir," sobbed Mrs. Slee. "He dursen't."

"I'm sorry to say, Mrs. Slee, that one of the policemen had watched him, and seen him help to carry a barrel of powder to the works."

"Just like him—just like him," sobbed Mrs. Slee, "but some one else was to fire it."

"How did you know that?" said the vicar, sharply.

"I only know as he dursen't hev done it hissen," sobbed the poor woman. "Poor lad, poor lad, there was nowt again him but the drink."

"The men I met were in search of Daisy Banks," continued the vicar, "and we joined hands with the police, who took your husband and that man from London, and afterwards we reached the works, and they are safe."

"I'm strange and glad they've took that London man," sobbed Mrs. Slee ; "but poor Sim! Poor, poor Sim! But I must go and say a word o' comfort to him. Smith, at station, 's a good, kind man."

"Who'll ever say that woman is not faithful?" said the vicar to himself, as Mrs. Slee hurried away to get her print hood, and, late as it was, to make her way to the

station; but as she came back sobbing bitterly, he laid his hand upon her arm.

"You need not go, Mrs. Slee; your husband and his confederate have escaped."

"Escaped? got away?" cried Mrs. Slee.

"Yes."

"Gone out o' the town?"

"Undoubtedly."

"Then," cried Mrs. Slee, wiping her eyes with a hasty snatch or two of her apron, "I'm glad on it. A bad villain, to go and try to do such a thing by the place as he made his bread by. I hope to goodness he'll niver come back," she cried, in her old sharp vinegary tone. "I hope I may niver set eyes upon him again. Bud I don't want him to go to prison. Bud you're not going out again to-night, sir?" she said, imploringly.

"I must go up to the House and see that all is well there, Mrs. Slee," he replied; "and call as I go and see how poor Banks is."

"Bud is it true, sir, that Daisy has come back?"

"Yes," said the vicar, sadly. "Poor girl, she has returned."

"Bud you wean't go now, sir; it's close upon two o'clock."

"Lie down on the sofa, Mrs. Slee. I shall be able to wake you when I come back."

"Theer niver was such a man," muttered Mrs. Slee, as she let him out; "and as for that Sim, well, I'm onmost sorry he did get away."

As the vicar approached the foreman's cottage, he saw some one cross the lighted window, and on getting nearer he recognised the figure.

"Is that you, Podmore?" he said in a low voice.

"Yes, sir, yes," was the reply. "I only thought I'd like to know how poor Joe Banks is getting on."

"I'm going in, and if you'll wait I'll tell you."

"Thank ye, sir, kindly," said the young man. "I will wait."

"Poor fellow?" thought the vicar, with a sigh; "even now, when she comes back stained and hopeless to the old home, his love clings to her still. It's a strange

thing this love! Shall she then, and in spite of all, find that I cannot root up a foolish hopeless passion that makes me weak—weak even as that poor fellow there?"

A low knock brought Daisy to the door, and on entering, it was to find Mrs. Banks on her knees by her husband, who seemed in a heavy sleep. The doctor had been again, and had only left half-an-hour before.

"He says there's nowt to fear, sir," whispered Mrs. Banks; "but, oh, sir, will he live?"

"We are in His hands, Mrs. Banks," was the reply. "I hope and pray he may."

Daisy was looking on with dilated eyes, and pale, drawn face, and as, after some little time, during which he had sought with homely, friendly words to comfort the trembling wife, he rose to go, Daisy approached to let him out, when fancying that he shrank from her, the poor girl's face became convulsed, and she tried hard but could not stifle a low wail.

She opened the door as he kindly said "Good night;" but as the faint light shone out across the garden and on to the low hedge, Daisy caught him by the arm.

"Don't go, sir," she whispered, in a frightened voice; "it mayn't be safe. Look: there's a man watching you."

"You are unnerved," he said, kindly; and then without thinking—"It is only Podmore; he was waiting as I came in."

"Tom!" the poor girl ejaculated, catching his arm, "is it Tom? Oh, sir, for the love of God, tell him I'm not the wicked girl he thinks."

"My poor girl."

"I was very wicked and weak, sir, in behaving as I did; but tell him—I must speak now—tell him it was Mrs. Glaire sent me away."

"Mrs. Glaire sent you away?" exclaimed the vicar.

"Yes, yes, yes," sobbed Daisy; "so that—her son—"

"To get you away from Richard Glaire?"

"Yes, sir; yes. I wish—I wish I'd never seen him."

"How came you at the foundry to-night?" he said, sharply.

"I went to tell him of the danger, sir. I went to the

House first, and they told me he was there. I hate him, I hate him," she cried, passionately, heedless of the apparent incongruity of her words, "and everybody thinks me wicked and bad."

"Is this true, Daisy Banks?" exclaimed the vicar.

"She couldn't tell a lie, sir," cried a hoarse voice. "Daisy, my poor bairn, I don't think it no more."

"Tom!" sobbed Daisy, with a hysterical cry; and the next moment she was sobbing on his breast, while the vicar softly withdrew, to turn, however, when he was fifty yards away, and see that the cottage door opened, and that two figures entered together before it was closed.

"Thank God!" he said, softly—"thank God!"

Lights were burning at the House as he reached the door, and, under the circumstances, he knocked and was admitted by the white-faced, trembling servant, who had been sitting with one of the policemen in the hall, the other guarding the works.

"Don't be alarmed, my girl, there is no bad news," he said; and with a sigh of relief the girl showed him in to where Richard, Eve, and Mrs. Glaire were seated, all watchful, pale, and ready to take alarm at the least sound.

"I'm glad you have come, Mr. Selwood," exclaimed Mrs. Glaire; while Richard gave him a sulky nod, Eve trying to rise, but sinking back trembling.

"I should have been here sooner," he said, "but I have had much to do."

"Is there any fresh danger?"

"None whatever," said the vicar. "I think the storm is over—I hope for good."

Mrs. Glaire gave a sigh of relief, and then wondered, as she saw the vicar cross the room; but the next minute a faint flush came into her pale cheeks, and she tottered to where Eve was sitting, and buried her face on her shoulder.

"Mr. Glaire," said the vicar, firmly, as he nerved himself for what he had to say, determined, as he was, to leave nothing undone in what he looked upon as his duty—"Mr. Glaire, I have done you a grievous wrong; I humbly ask your pardon."

"What do you mean?" asked Richard, starting, and wondering, with his customary distrust in human nature, whether it was some trap.

"I mean that, in common with others, I believed you guilty of inveigling Daisy Banks away."

"It don't matter to me what people think," said Richard, roughly.

"I am sorry I misjudged you," continued the vicar; "and once more I ask your pardon."

"It don't matter," said Richard.

"Mrs. Glaire," the vicar continued, kindly, as he drew a chair to her side, and took her hand, "you did a foolish, cruel thing in this."

"Then you know all?" she sobbed.

"Yes, all—from the lips of Daisy herself. I will not blame you, though, for the act has recoiled upon yourself, and it is only by great mercy that, embittered as these men were through it, a horrible crime has not been committed."

"I did it—I did it to save him," sobbed Mrs. Glaire. "I am a mother, and he is my only boy."

"Poor stricken Banks is a father, and Daisy is his only child. Mrs. Glaire, you did him a cruel wrong. Why did you not trust me?"

"I was mad and foolish," she sobbed. "I dared not trust any one, even Daisy; and I thought it would be best for all—that it would save her, and it has been all in vain. Look at him," she cried, angrily; "after all, he defies me, insults his cousin's love, and, when the poor foolish girl comes back, his first act is to seek her, to the forgetting of his every promise to us both."

Eve had covered her face with her hands.

"Daisy is as bad as he," continued Mrs. Glaire, angrily.

"There you are mistaken," said the vicar: "her act to-night was to warn your son of his dreadful danger. She went to save him from a terrible death."

"Pray say no more," said Mrs. Glaire, shuddering; and Richard turned of a sallow yellow.

"It has been a terrible affair," said the vicar; "but I sincerely hope that all is over, for your act has borne

fruits, Mrs. Glaire, and Daisy has seen the folly of the past."

Richard looked up wonderingly, but refused to meet their visitor's eye.

"I have spoken hastily, and I owe you an apology, Miss Pelly," continued the vicar, rising; "but it was better to be plain, even before you. I was only too glad, though, to come and apologise to Mr. Glaire for the wrong I had done."

"But poor Joe Banks!" exclaimed Mrs. Glaire.

"He seems to have been struck down by an apoplectic fit. He was shocked, no doubt, at finding that so dastardly an attempt had been made, and at the sight of your son and his child in such imminent peril. I hope, however, and sincerely believe, that he will recover. I have just come from there. Good night."

He pressed Mrs. Glaire's hand, and held that of Eve's for a few moments, saying to himself, "Poor girl, I have lightened her heart of some of its load. I have somewhat cleared the man she loves."

"Good night, Mr. Glaire," he said, turning to Richard.

"I'll see you out," said Richard; and he followed him to the now vacant hall.

"What did you mean," he said, roughly, "about Daisy?"

"I mean," said the vicar, laying his hand upon the young man's shoulder, "that she has awakened to the folly and weakness of her dealings with you, sir, and to the truth, honesty, and faith of the man who has loved her for so long."

"Podmore?" hissed Richard.

"Yes, Podmore. Now, Mr. Glaire, your course is open."

"What do you mean?" cried Richard, angrily.

"Act as a man of honour."

"I don't understand you."

"And all will be forgiven. Good night."

"Curse him!" cried Richard, with an impatient stamp; and he stood gnawing his fair moustache. Then, with a smile of triumph, damped by a hasty glance of fear up and down the street, he hurriedly closed the door.

CHAPTER LIII.

DAISY'S LETTER.

The weeks slipped rapidly by, and a great change had come over Dumford. The sky was blackened once more with smoke, the furnaces roared, there was the loud chink of metal heard, and the hiss of steam as the engines thudded and clanked, while at dinner time the great gates gave forth their troops of grimy workmen.

Homes looked brighter once more, and "my maister" was not seen with lowering brow leaning against the door-post all day long, but tired and hearty, ready to play with the bairns, or busy himself in his bit of garden.

The trade, too, had brightened up, and one and all thanked goodness that their troubles were over, and prayed that they might be long in coming again.

Something of a search had been made for Sim Slee, and the police authorities had been pretty active; but Sim and the "deppitation" managed to keep out of sight, and Richard Glaire was in no wise anxious to have the matter too closely investigated.

He kept to his story that he found the train laid in the foundry, and Banks the foreman destroyed it, and the place was saved. This he opened at once, and the men gladly resumed work, the vicar's influence telling upon them, and one and all being ready to ignore the past, and try to condone it by regular attendance at the time-keeper's wicket.

Banks recovered rapidly, and, on learning the truth, sent for Richard, who, however, refused to go to the house to see him, while on his part the foreman declined to resume his position at the foundry.

"No, sir," he said to the vicar; "I weer in the wrong, and I shouldn't feel it were raight to go back theer again. I'm sorry I misjudged him as I did, and I weer too hard upon him; but he hasn't used me well, neither has Mrs. Glaire. But theer, let bygones be bygones. I shan't starve, and I'm only too happy to hev my poor lass back again, safe and sound—safe and sound,

while the missus is in high feather to find that Daisy and her fav'rite, Tom Podmore, hev come together efter all."

That same day, as it happened, Mrs. Glaire called at the cottage, with Eve Pelly, and while the former talked with her old foreman, Eve went into the little garden with Daisy.

"I've called to ask you to come back, Joe Banks, at my son's wish," said Mrs. Glaire. "He desires that we bury the past, and that you resume your post, for the place is not the same without you."

"Nay, Mrs. Glaire, nay," said Banks, shaking his head; "that can never be again. I should hev had to give it up some day, so let it be now. And, as you say, ma'am, let bygones be bygones. We were both in the wrong."

"Both, Joe," said Mrs. Glaire, sadly; "but you will forgive me. I did what I did for the best."

"Ay, I believe thee, but it weer very hard to bear. I deserved it, though, for I might hev knowed that he niver meant to wed my poor lass. Bud theer that's all past and gone—past and gone. Hey, ma'am, look at them two i' the garden. They seem good friends enew now. And so she's to be married to Master Dick to-morrow?"

"Yes, Joe," said Mrs. Glaire, hastily, "it will be for the best. My son is all that I could wish for now;" and they sat looking out at the two young girls as they stood talking.

Their conversation had been on indifferent things for some time, but Daisy felt a guilty knowledge of something she ought to tell, for Eve was so sweet and gentle with her; not one word or look of reproach had been said, but there had so far been no word of the future.

At length Daisy spoke out.

"Do you quite forgive me, Miss Eve?" she said. "I could not help it then, though I fought against it, and was wretched all the time."

"Yes, Daisy, yes," cried Eve, eagerly; and she took the other's hand; "but tell me truly—do you—do you—oh, I cannot say it."

"Do I care for Mr. Richard Glaire?" said Daisy, with a strange smile. "Do I feel hurt because you will be married to him to-morrow? Not a bit. Don't think that, dear Miss Eve, for I love poor Tom with all my heart, and only wish I could make him a better wife."

"And you will be married soon, too?" exclaimed Eve.

"Maybe in a month or two," said Daisy, looking sadly at her visitor; "we do not want to hurry it on. I wish you every happiness, Miss Eve."

"And I you, Daisy," said Eve, looking at her with a wondering wistful look, and asking herself how it was that Richard should have conceived so mad a passion for this girl, while for her his attentions had been of the coldest type.

"Mr. Selwood is going to marry you, then?" said Daisy, quietly, for want of something to carry on the conversation. "But what ails you, Miss Eve, are you ill?"

"No, no, nothing," said Eve, hastily. "It is hot to-day, that's all."

And then the two girls stood silent for a while, Eve thinking that the vicar came so seldom now, and then his visits were so quiet and formal; while Daisy kept asking herself one question, and that was—

"Shall I tell her?"

And the answer—

"No, it would be cruel now, and once they and I are married, all that will be over."

When the visitors had gone, Daisy went up to her bedroom, and took from a little drawer a note which she had received the previous night. It ran as follows:—

"You know how I love you, and how I have watched for weeks for a chance to speak to you. I have been night after night at the old places, believing you would come, but not one glance have I had of you, not one word. Dearest Daisy, by all our old meetings, I ask you to give me one more. Don't heed the chatter of the place, but come up to the old spot as soon as you receive this, for I am obliged to write. If too late I will be there to-morrow night. Only come and say one loving word to me, and all you have heard shall be as nothing.

I cannot live without you, so come; and if you will I am ready to take you anywhere—far away, as I have promised you before."

Daisy sat looking at the letter, and read it again and again.

"Only to think," she said at last; "a few months ago I should have sighed and sobbed over that note, and been almost ready to be dragged by him where he would, while now—it makes me almost sick. What could I have seen in his soft boyish face to make me feel as I did? But what shall I do? It seems cruel to let that poor girl go to the church with such a man, only that she might save him. And suppose he makes her miserable for life."

Daisy turned pale, and sat thinking till she heard her father call, and then she hastily thrust the letter into her bosom, her face grew radiant, and she hurried down, for her father's words had been—

"Daisy, lass, here's Tom!"

CHAPTER LIV.

THE EVE OF THE WEDDING.

THAT same evening Eve Pelly was in the garden with Mrs. Glaire—the old familiar garden where she had spent so many happy hours, while now she was sad with a sadness that made the tears rise and fill her eyes.

The old place, with its abundant flowers, its roses climbing the old red-brick wall, the well-shaven lawn, with its quaint rustic vases and flower-beds, and the seats where she had read and worked since a child. It was her dear old home, and she was not going to leave it, but all the same, on this the eve of her marriage, it seemed to her that the end had come, and that she was about to bid it all farewell.

It had been an anxious day, for many friends had called, and present after present had been brought, all of which, in spite of herself, she had received with tears, and gladly escaped afterwards to the solitude of her own room.

Even the workmen had clubbed together, and, in spite

of past hard times, bought a handsome silver teapot, which came "With the men's dooty to Miss Eve."

For they recalled her sweet gentle face, patiently watching by or bringing flowers to many a sick wife or child; and it was said that every man in the works, with all his belongings, was to be at the church next morning.

Mrs. Glaire was with Eve, but at last she said she would go in, the latter pleading that she would like to stay a little longer in the soft glow of the evening sun; and so it happened that at last she was left, and feeling glad at heart that Richard had been away all day, she sat down alone to think.

It was so strange she could hardly realise it, and yet this was the last day, and to-morrow she would be Richard's wife.

The warm glow of the setting sun was around her, but a deadly pallor was upon her face, and she began to tremble.

"Am I going to be ill?" she asked herself; and then, making an effort, she tried to shake off the feeling.

"Richard's wife," she mused. "May I have strength to make him love me dearly, and to be to him the best of wives."

It was a fervent wish, but as it passed her trembling lips, the tears began to flow, and though she fought against it, the thoughts would come rushing through her brain of what might have been had some one else known her sooner, and not looked down upon her as a poor weak, simple girl.

"Oh, but this is dreadful," she moaned; "disloyal to poor Dick—cruel to myself. What shall I do!"

She was hastily drying her eyes, when a step on the gravel startled her, and Jacky Budd appeared, red-nosed as of old, and bearing a small round basket and a packet.

"From Master Selwood, Miss Eve. Parson said I was to gi'e 'em to yow, so I brote 'em down the garden mysen, and my dooty to you, Miss, and may you be very happy, and I'd take it kindly if yow'd let me drink your health, and long life to you."

Eve smiled her thanks as she placed a shilling in his hand, sending Jacky away a happy man, as he calculated

that that shilling contained eight gills of ale, and to him what he called comfort for his sorrows.

As the gardener went away, Eve's agitation became excessive, and she hardly dared to lift the lid of the basket.

But a short time since, and she had mentally reproached him for forgetting her, as no token whatever had arrived, only a formal note to her aunt, saying that he would be at the church at ten the next morning, while all the time his thoughts had been of her, for here was the token.

A glad flush overspread her cheeks, as at last she took the basket and raised the lid, to find within a large bouquet of costly white exotics, the stephanotis amongst which sent forth its sweet perfume, mingled with that of orange blossoms—a gift to a bride.

"A gift to a bride," she whispered, and the flush faded, even as the sunbeams were paling fast in the trees above her head.

A bitter sigh escaped her lips—a sigh that was almost a moan, and as she raised the bouquet and kissed it, the tears fell fast, and lay glistening like rain amidst the petals.

"If he knew; if he knew," she whispered, "it would be cruel; but he does not know—he never will know, and after to-night this must be as a dream."

Almost mechanically she took the little square white packet that lay on the garden seat by her side, and breaking the seal, on which was the vicar's crest, she found a small square morocco case; and when at last her trembling fingers had pressed the snap and raised the lid, there upon pale blue velvet lay a large oval locket, crusted with diamonds and pearls, a costly gift that glistened in the fading light, and beside it a scrap of paper, with the words—

"God bless you! May you be very happy."

Eve sat with one hand laid upon her bosom to still its throbbings, and, then her lips were pressed to the locket—longer still to the scrap of paper, before the case was shut, and she sat gazing up at the first stars in the pale, soft sky.

A low, deep sigh escaped her lips, and then with a weary look round—

"I am stronger now," she said, and rose to go, but only shrank back in her seat as she heard a rustling noise, and then a thud, as if some one had jumped from the wall, while before she could recover herself, Tom Podmore stood before her.

"Is—is anything wrong?" she gasped; for in her nervous state this sudden apparition suggested untold horrors to her excited brain.

"It's only me. Miss Eve. I wanted just a word."

"Why—why did you not come to the house?" she faltered.

"Don't be scarred, miss. I only wanted to be sure o' seeing you alone. I just want to ask you something."

"Yes," she said, composing herself.

"I want to ask you to forgive me, miss, if I hurt your feelings, and do something as'll make you feel bitter again me."

"You would not hurt me, Tom?" said Eve, rising and laying her hand upon his arm.

"God knows I wouldn't, miss, any more than I would one of His angels," said the young fellow, excitedly; "and that's why I've come. I couldn't feel as it weer raight not to come, and even though you may think it spiteful, it isn't, but on'y for your sake alone."

"Yes," said Eve, who felt giddy. "You have something dreadful to tell me."

"No, miss," said the young man, solemnly, "not to tell you, only a note to gi'e you."

"A note—from Mr. Selwood?"

"No miss," said Tom, not seeing the warm flush in the girl's face, "a note as weer sent last night to my Daisy, and which she give to me an hour ago."

"A note?" faltered Eve, again.

"Yes, miss, a note. Daisy talked it ower wi' me, and I said as you ought to see it; and even if it hurts you sore, I felt I must gi'e it to you, and theer it is."

Eve felt the paper, and was aware of the fact that her visitor had scrambled over the wall, and was gone, and

still she stood clutching the paper tightly, till a voice made her start, and thrust the paper into her bosom.

"Eve, my child, it is damp and late."

It was Mrs. Glaire calling, and, picking up her presents, Eve slowly went up the garden, feeling like one in a dream, till she entered through the open window, where Mrs. Glaire was waiting.

"Why, you are quite cold, my child," said Mrs. Glaire, tenderly, as she closed the windows, and led the trembling girl to an easy chair by the tea-table, the shaded lamp shedding a pleasant glow upon the steaming urn.

"It is getting cold, aunt," said Eve, with a shiver; and she drank the tea poured ready for her with avidity.

"More presents, my darling?" said Mrs. Glaire, leaning over and kissing her. "Eve, child, you are making me very happy."

Eve's arms were flung round her neck, and she sobbed there in silence for a few moments.

"Don't cry, my darling; try and think it is for the best. It is—you know it is, and the past must all be forgotten. But where is Dick? He must be buying presents, or arranging something, or he would be here," she said, cheerfully. "By the way, Eve, what are those? Did Richard send them?"

"No, aunt," said Eve, hoarsely; "they are from Mr. Selwood."

"Always a kind, good friend," said Mrs. Glaire, whose voice shook a little as she looked at the gifts. "Make Richard think better of him, Eve, for he is a true, good friend."

Eve did not answer, for her hand was upon her breast, and beneath that hand she could feel the paper. Her great dread was that Richard should come back, and she prayed that he might not return.

Ten o'clock sounded, and then eleven, from the little pendule on the chimney-piece, and still he did not come; and Mrs. Glaire, noticing the poor girl's agitation, proposed rest.

"I will sit up for Dick, Eve," she said, cheerfully. "He is preparing some surprise;" but, as soon as her niece had kissed her lovingly, and left the room, a haggard

look came over the mother's countenance, and she knelt down for a few moments beside the couch.

She started up, though, for she heard her son's step in the hall, and he entered directly, looking hot and flushed.

"Where's Evey?" he asked.

"Gone to bed, my boy," replied Mrs. Glaire. "Dick, you should have stayed at home to-night."

"Oh, all right," he said, lightly, and with a bitter sneer; "it's the last night, and I thought I might have a run."

"I'm not blaming you, dear," said Mrs. Glaire, kissing his forehead; "only poor Eve looked so sad and ill to-night."

Had she seen her then, she would have cried out in fear, for, with an open paper in her hand, Eve was pacing up and down her room, to throw herself at last upon her knees in agony, and after many hours sob herself to sleep.

CHAPTER LV.

THE HAPPY DAY.

It was gala day in Dumford. The past bitter times were forgotten, and the men had rigged up an arch of evergreens. The children were in their best, and gardens had been stripped of their flowers. Half the town had been twice to the Bull to see the barouche and the four greys that had been ordered from Ranby, and the postboys, in their white beaver hats, had been asked to drink more times than was safe for those they had to drive.

The church, too, was decorated with flowers from the vicarage garden, and new gravel laid down from porch to gate. The ringers were there, and the singers, and the musicians making their way to the loft, while the various pews and sittings were filled to a degree "not knowed," Jacky Budd said, "for years an' years."

The school children were ready, armed with baskets of flowers, and had been well tutored by the school-mistress to throw them as the bride and bridegroom came out. This lady sighed as she saw the preparations, and told Jacky Budd to open more windows, because the bodies

smelt so bad, and Jacky said they did, and it gave him quite a sinking: but the hint was not taken.

In the vicarage Murray Selwood sat looking pale and stern, beside his untasted breakfast, and it was not till, with affectionate earnestness and the tears in her eyes, Mrs. Slee had begged him to take a cup of tea, that he had yielded, and eaten also a slice of toast.

"I know thou'rt ill, sir," she said. "Let me send for Mr. Purley."

"No, no, Mrs. Slee," he said, shaking off his air of gloom; "only a fit of low spirits. I shall be better soon."

Mrs. Slee shook her head as she went back to the kitchen.

"He wean't: he's been getting worse for weeks and weeks, and it makes me wretched to see him look so wankle."

Meanwhile at the House all was excitement. Eve had risen at daybreak to sit and watch the rising sun and ask herself what she should do. She had promised to be Richard's wife. Her aunt's happiness, perhaps her life, depended upon it, and it was to save her cousin. She was to redeem him, offering herself as a sacrifice to bring him back to better ways, to make him a good and faithful husband, and yet in her bosom lay those damning lines, telling of his infidelity in spirit—of his passion for another, and again and again she wailed—

"He never loved me, and he never will."

Should she go—could she fly somewhere far away, where she might work and gain her own living, anywhere, in any humble station, in peace?

And Richard—her aunt?

No, no, it was impossible; and think how she would, the bitter feeling came back to her that she had promised her aunt, and she must keep her word.

And besides, if Richard was like this now, what would he be if she refused him at this eleventh hour, and cast him off. She shuddered at the thought, and at last grew calmer and more resigned.

In this way the hours passed on, till in a quiet mechanical manner she was dressed by the maid, who was

enthusiastic in her praises of dress, jewels, flowers, everything.

Mrs. Glaire was very pale, but bright and active, and in a supercilious, half-sneering way, Richard watched till all was ready, and the guests who had been invited had arrived.

A look from his mother brought him a little more to his senses, and he went to and kissed Eve, to find her lips like fire, while her hands were as ice, and at last he sat there feverish and impatient.

"I want it over," he said, angrily, to Mrs. Glaire. "I hate being made such an exhibition of. Will the carriages never come?"

An end was put to his impatience by the arrival of the first, in which he took his departure with his best man, his appearance being the signal for a volley of cheers.

Mrs. Glaire went last, in the same carriage with Mr. Purley, the doctor, and Eve, the stout old fellow trying to keep up the bride's spirits by jokes of his ordinary calibre, the principal one being that he hoped the carriage would not break down under his weight, a witticism at which he laughed heartily, as he responded with bows and hand-wavings to the cheers of the people who lined the High Street of the little town.

Everything looked bright and gay, for the sun shone brilliantly; ropes laden with streamers were stretched across the street, while flags hung here and there, where satisfactory places could be found; and in front of the Bull, a party of the workmen had arranged a little battery of roughly-cast guns, sufficiently strong and large to give a good report when loaded with powder, the landlord having arranged to have a red-hot poker ready for discharging the pieces as soon as the wedding was over.

CHAPTER LVI.

"WILT THOU—?"

THE old troubles of the strike were over and forgotten, and the town's intent on this day was to give itself up to feasting, with its ordinary accompaniment of more drink than was good for those who partook.

Down by the churchyard the crowd had long secured to itself the best positions, the favourite places for viewing the coming and departing of the bridal party being the churchyard wall and the two railed tombs; but the boys put up with tombstones, and hurrahed till they were hoarse.

Jacky Budd got the first cheer, as he went up solemnly to the church door, evidently feeling his own importance, but he was checked half-way along the path by some one saying in a quiet, remonstrating tone—

"Say, Jacky, wean't yow stop an' hev a drain?"

He looked sharply round, and his hand went to his mouth, while a roar of laughter rose up from the merry crowd, and hastened his steps into the porch.

Trappy Pape was the next to be joked, as he came up hugging the green baize bag containing his violoncello.

"Say, Trappy, hast thee fed thee be-ast?" said one.

"Hast giv' the poor owd fiddle its rozzum?" cried another.

"Trappy, lad," shouted another, "does ta sleep inside that owd thing?"

The violoncello player hurried into the church, and Joey South came into view, to the great delight of the crowd.

"Here comes owd Poll Pry," cried one.

"Look at his owd umbrella," cried another.

"Why don't ta put th' umbrella up?" cried another voice, "it's going to ree-an next week."

Here there was another roar of laughter.

"Look at his leather breeches."

"Say, Joey, wast ta sewed in 'em when they weer made?"

"Ay, lad, they weer made on him i' the year one, and niver been off since."

"Mind yon goon don't go off," cried one of the chief jokers, as the boy came by bearing Joey's bassoon.

"Is she loaded, Joey?"

"Ay, lad, he rams her full wi' kitchen poker," cried another.

Joey South escaped into the porch, grinning angrily, for

a fresh minstrel appeared in the shape of "Owd Billy Stocks" with his clarionet.

"Hey, lads, here's owd Billy. How's the clarinet, Billy?"

"Didst put a bit more waxey band round her, Billy?"

"Ay, lads, and she's got a new reed."

"Don't split parson's ears, Billy."

"Hey, here's Tommy Johnson and Johnny Buffam. Tak' care, lads."

"Where's the brass?" shouted somebody.

"Hey," cried another, "stop 'em—big goons aint allowed i' the pooblic street."

The two musicians hugged the French horn and ophecleide to their sides, and tried to smile.

"Don't 'e blow paarson's brains out wi' that thing Johnny Buffam."

"Dost a make the dead rise wi' it, Tommy, lad?" cried another.

"Say, Tommy," said another, "keep thee fist tight i' the bell, or thee'll do some un a mischief."

The appearance of Robinson, the landlord, and his wife, in gorgeous array, saved the brass instrument players from further banter, for the landlord had to be cheered. Then came churchwarden Bultitude, with, close behind, Jessie and John Maine, and this party had to be cheered.

"Say, Chutchwarden, why don't a give parson a job for them two?" shouted some one; and, with scarlet cheeks, poor Jessie hurried into the church, where her eyes met John Maine's with no disfavour.

"Wheer's Tom Podmore? Why don't he bring his lass?" shouted a workman.

But neither Daisy, Tom, nor Banks put in an appearance; and the crowd were on the look-out for some one else to banter, when the vicar appeared, to be received with deafening cheers, the men pressing forward to shake hands as he went slowly up the path.

"Say, mun, parson looks straange and wankle," said one.

"Ay, but he is pasty-faced; he's been wucking too hard."

"Wucking!" said another; "why, he's nowt to do.'

"Nowt to do, lad! why, he does as much i' one week as thou dost i' a month."

"Say," said another, "I'm getting strange and hungry."

"Theer'll be plenty to yeat by and by," said another. "Hey, here's owd Ransome and Tomson, the man as neither liked gristle nor swarth, but was very fond o' pig's feet."

"It warn't he, but the servant gell as they had. Say, owd Ransome, hast got a new gell yet?"

"What weer it about t'owd one?" said another.

"Why, they 'most pined her to dead."

"Hey, I thought they lived well theer."

"She towd my missus that she should leave, for she had beef and mutton and pigeon-pie till she wus sick to dead on 'em."

"Poor lass!" said another. "That weer her as see owd Ransome's wife makking the pie."

"Hey, and what weer that?"

"Ah, she says, 'Sugarmum and buttermum, it'll be a straange dear pie, mum.'"

"Here's Dicky Glaire!" now was shouted, and plenty of cheers arose; but the men talked critically about his personal appearance as he got out of the carriage and went up the path with a supercilious smile upon his face.

"He's another pasty-faced un," said one of the chief speakers. "Dicky isn't half the man his father weer."

"Hearken to owd Mother Cakebread," said one of the men; "she says she'd sooner marry tawn's poomp."

"Here's owd Satan comin' to chutch," cried a voice, as Primgeon, the lawyer, a tall, smooth-faced, sallow man, got out of the next carriage, but they cheered him well, and the guests in the next two carriages, when the cry arose:—

"Here's the Missus!"

"Gi'e the owd gell a good un, lads. Hats off."

"Three cheers for the doctor."

"Gie's a ride i' the chay, doctor."

"Hooray."

The cheers were hearty enough, as Purley handed out Mrs. Glaire and the bride and began to move slowly up the path, for the excitement was such that the crowd

pressed forward upon them in the midst of the deafening cries, while a faint flush came upon Eve Pelly's face, as she raised her eyes, and the icy look upon her face passed off, thawed by the sunshine of the warm greetings.

"God bless you, Miss Eve—hooray for Miss Eve!"

"Hurray!" shouted one of the leaders of the strike. "May all her bairns be gells."

"Like their moother," shouted another.

"Hooray, lads! Gi'e her another; put your showthers into it."

There was a deafening roar from a couple of hundred throats, and then the poor school-mistress's arrangements were overset, for a voice shouted :—

"Fling thee flowers now, bairns;" and the bride went up to the church on a floral carpet, and with a shower falling upon her from all around.

"What a shame!" cried the school-mistress, as the party disappeared through the porch, and she was carried after them by the crowd which followed.

"Niver mind, owd lass, the bairns can pick 'em up, and fling 'em again."

Poor flowers, they looked crushed and drooping now, though, as Eve Pelly walked up the damp old aisle, feeling as if it were all some dream, and beginning to tremble now as she approached the altar, where the rest of the party were assembled, from among whom came Richard, who had cast off his supercilious air, and was trying to play his part of bridegroom as became his position.

The young fellow was flushed now with the excitement of the scene, and somewhat carried away by the interest displayed by the town on the occasion of his marriage. He hardly heeded his mother's words as she clung to his hand for a moment, and whispered :—

"You see, my son: now take your position that your father won for you, of the first man in Dumford."

"I will, mother," he exclaimed, proudly; and he glanced round the church, to see it crowded, even the aisles being densely packed, a low, murmuring buzz arising, which was checked, though, as the vicar, in his white surplice, moved from behind the great tomb, looking white almost as the linen he wore, and took his place inside the low wooden

altar rails, which Jacky Budd bustled officiously to close, giving his lips a smack as if he scented the feasting that generally followed this operation, and hastened to replace the hassocks in front of the little gates.

Eve's eyes rested upon the vicar's for a moment as she was led by some one, she could not tell whom, and told to stand in a particular position; there was a strange whirring sound in her head, and the place was alternately swimming round her, and then coming to a dead stand, and beginning to recede, till the whole of the chancel seemed to be reproduced with photographic minuteness far away, as if seen through the wrong end of a telescope.

Then the mutterings of the crowd in the church reached her; Mrs. Glaire whispered, "Be strong for my sake," and Richard Glaire, dimly seen, stood beside her; and before her, calm and motionless, divided from her by the quaint old wooden barrier, soon to be divided from her by bars that were a thousand times as strong, stood the man that she knew and owned now, with a kind of desperation, that she loved.

It was a blasphemy, she told herself, to stand there as she did, ready to lie before her Maker; but as she mentally said this she prayed that her sin might be forgiven, and her act looked upon as a sacrifice to save her who had been to her as a mother, and Richard Glaire from a downward career; and as this prayer was repeated she heard the deep, sad voice of the vicar speaking.

The words came slowly, and the utterance grew deeper as, hardly able to bear the bitter agony he experienced, Murray Selwood addressed the first solemn words of the service to those before him, going on to "I require and charge you both," while the silence in the church was almost painful.

Then turning to Richard, and with his voice rising, he asked the question—

"Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded wife, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou love her (a pause), comfort her (another pause), honour, and keep her in sickness and in health; and forsaking all other, keep thee only unto her (a long and painful pause, during which Richard Glaire

winced as he tried to meet the questioning eyes fixed on his, and failed), so long as ye both shall live?"

"I will," answered Richard, once more trying to meet the eyes that were fixed upon him in solemn question, and failing miserably.

Those who watched the service from close by, remembered afterwards that the vicar's voice became low and trembling as, turning to Eve, he asked her—

"Wilt thou have this man to thy wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of matrimony? Wilt thou obey him, and serve him, love, honour, and keep him in sickness and in health; and forsaking all other, keep thee only unto him so long as ye both shall live?"

There was a dead silence, and Richard Glaire felt his breath catch, as if a hand was at his throat, as he saw Eve look wildly round from face to face, and at last let her eyes rest with a horrified expression upon those of the man who had asked her that solemn question. So deep was the silence, that a whisper would have been plainly heard, and the voice of the clerk sounded painful and strange, as he said in a low voice—

"Answer 'I will.'"

There was another painful pause, and then throwing herself on her knees, and clutching the altar rail as one might have sought sanctuary in days of old, Eve shrieked out—

"No, no, no, no—God forgive me—I do not love him, and I never can!"

Richard Glaire muttered an oath between his teeth, and stooped to raise her, but the book was dropped, and the vicar's strong arm thrust him away.

"Stand back, sir," he exclaimed; "this marriage cannot proceed. Mr. Purley."

The doctor stepped forward, raised, and laid the fainting girl upon the cushions hastily spread upon the stones of the chancel; and, tearing off his surplice, the vicar was the first to bring wine, and take one of the cold thn hands, as he knelt beside her, while Richard, trembling with fury, sought to be heard.

"It's no use," said the doctor, firmly. "Poor girl!

over-excitement—nerves unstrung. We shall have brain fever if there is not the greatest care."

"It's all nonsense," cried Richard, passionately. "A mere whim—a girl's silly fainting-fit. Bring her to, doctor, and the marriage shall go on."

"I told you, sir," said the vicar, sternly, "that it could not go on. Poor girl: she could bear no more."

"But," shrieked Richard, "it shall go on. Do you think I'll be made such a fool of before the town? Curse you, this is your doing, and—"

"Silence, sir," thundered the vicar. "You are in God's house. Leave it this instant."

Richard clenched his fist menacingly, but the stern eyes upon him made him drop them, and he fell back, the crowd opening to let him pass, when Mrs. Glaire tottered to his side.

"My son, my son," she faltered, clinging to his hand, but he flung her off, and strode out at the little chancel door, ran hastily round to where the carriage with its four greys was in waiting, and as the wondering crowd closed round, he whispered to the nearest post-boy:—

"Quick—to the station. Gallop!"

The crowd parted, and the boys raised a cheer; and, as if to make the mocking sounds more painful, a man ran out from the Bull with a red-hot poker, and applied it to one of the little rough cannon.

There was a deafening explosion, and a tremendous jerk, as the frightened horses tore off at full gallop along the High Street, the chariot swaying from side to side on its tall springs, while all the post-boys could do was to keep their seats.

Shrieks and cries arose as the horses tore along, gathering speed at each stride, and growing more frightened at the gathering noise.

On past the various houses, past his home and the works, and Richard clung desperately to the seat. For a moment he thought of throwing himself out, but in that moment he saw himself caught by the wheel, and whirled round and beaten into a shapeless pulp, and with a cry of horror he sank back.

On still, and on, at a wild gallop; and, to his horror,

Richard saw that the horses were making straight for the great chalk pit, and in imagination he saw the carriage drawn right over the precipice, to fall crushed to atoms upon the hard masses below.

"I cannot bear this," he exclaimed; and, turning the handle, he was about to leap out when the fore wheel of the chariot came with fearful violence against the short thick mile-stone; there was a tremendous crash as the vehicle was turned completely over, and Richard knew no more.

A dozen stout fellows, who had run panting after the carriage, came up a few minutes later, to find one of the post-boys holding the trembling horses, which, after being released from the wreck, they had succeeded in stopping, and the other was striving hard to extricate Richard from where he lay, crushed and bleeding, amidst the splinters of the broken chariot.

The sturdy foundry-men soon tore away the part of the carriage that held the injured man, and a gate being taken from its hinges, he was carried back to the town; the doctor, who had been attending Eve at the vicarage, where she had been carried, having reached his house to fetch some medicine, which he sent on with a message to Mrs. Glaire, who was in ignorance of the catastrophe, to come home at once.

CHAPTER LVII.

REST AT LAST.

A couple of months had glided away, during which time Richard Glaire had recovered from the severe injuries he had received in the accident, and then, as he said, gone on the continent to recruit his shattered nerves; though in confidence Doctor Purley told his lodger Dick Glaire's nerves were stronger than ever, in consequence of eight weeks' enforced attention to the orders of his medical man.

Richard wanted to get away, for several things had occurred to annoy him. He was only just recovering, when the news reached him that Daisy Banks had become Tom Podmore's wife; and this was at a time when he

was in the habit of saying bitter things to Mrs. Glaire about the disgraceful arrangement by which Eve was still at the vicarage, where she had been carried from the church, and where she had lain through her long illness which followed, during which she was for weeks delirious, and knew neither of those who watched incessantly by her side.

Daisy Banks was her most constant attendant, and had taken up her residence at the vicarage with Miss Purley, who had told the vicar she would do anything to oblige him; and when he thanked her warmly, had gone up to her room at once to prepare, and sat down, poor woman, and cried with misery, because she was forty-three, very thin, and no one ever had, and probably never would, ask her to be a wife.

So the vicar became Doctor Purley's lodger, never once crossing his own threshold, and Mrs. Glaire went down daily from her son's sick bed to see how poor Eve sped.

Days and days of anxiety and anxious watching of the doctor's face as he came home from his visits, and little hope. Days when the eminent physician from the county town came over, to give his supplementary advice; and still, though both doctors shook their heads, Eve lived on—a wavering flame, ready to be extinguished by the first rough waft of air.

"Selwood," said the doctor one night, "I've lost over a stone weight since I've been attending that poor girl, and I've done my best; everything I know or could get from others. I'm going back now, for this is about the critical time, and I shall stay all night. Why, man! Come, come, I say."

He laid his hand upon the vicar's shoulder, for the strong man's head had gone down upon his hands. He had fought his grief back, and borne so much—now he had given way.

"I am weak," said the vicar, gently. "Pray go."

"Yes," said the stout old fellow, with animation; and the desponding feeling seemed to have gone. "Yes, I'll go and watch while you pray; and between us, with God's help, we may save her yet."

As the night wore on, and the town grew stilled in sleep, the vicar rose and left the house, to go silently down the High Street, past the church, to his own home, where he could lean against the gate, and watch for hour after hour the little lighted window with its drawn blind, and the one glowing spot where the candle burned.

Hour after hour, sometimes walking up and down, but always with the prayer upon his lip that she might be spared.

Sometimes a shadow crossed the blind, and a light went through the house. Then all was still again, and the night went on, with the stars that had risen as he watched passing over his head, and at last a faint, pearly light beginning to dawn in the east, and grow broader. The first chirp of a morning bird, as the pale light grew stronger, answering chirps, and the loud alarm-note of the blackbird that rose from the hedge beside him, dipped down, and skimmed rapidly along the ditch.

The light brightened in the east, but paled in the window of the sick girl's room; and the watcher's heart sank low, for he knew too well that this was the hour when vitality was at its lowest ebb, and that, perhaps, at this very time the gentle spirit of Eve might be winging its way to a purer realm.

"My poor love—my love!" he murmured, as he leaned upon the gate; and if ever man prayed fervently, that was a heartfelt prayer breathed from his lips, and it seemed, in his weak worn state, borne upwards by a winged messenger which rose from the field hard by, singing its morning song of joy and praise.

He watched that lark as it rose higher and higher, its clear notes ringing far and wide, but growing gradually fainter and fainter, till the bird seemed lost to his gaze, as the song was to his ear. But as he watched the sky turned from its pale dawn, tinged with a warmer flush, to one glorious damask fret of orange and gold, lighting up the trees and flowers of his garden as he let his eyes fall to earth, and then, as they rested on the window, it was to see that it was blank and cold and grey.

He could not stir, only stand gazing there with a horrible sinking feeling—a terrible dread, and though the

sun rose slowly, his light seemed pale and sickly to the heart-stricken man, whose worst fears seemed confirmed when the door opened, and the heavy, burly figure of the doctor appeared, coming softly down the gravel walk.

"You here, Selwood!" he exclaimed.

The vicar bowed his head.

"You have been here all night!"

"Yes, but tell me. I can bear it now. Does she sleep?"

"Yes," said the doctor, pausing; and as he saw the weary head sink lower, he continued, "Yes, but not the sleep you mean. The crisis is past, dear friend, and Eve Pelly lives."

It was one soft delicious afternoon, when the vicarage garden was aglow with flowers, mellow with sunshine, and joyous with the hum of the insect world, that in obedience to Eve's wish the vicar went down, to find her looking very thin and pale, but inexpressibly sweeter than she had ever seemed before, seated on the old rustic seat beneath the great hedge of mingled holly and yew. Daisy was with her as he entered the garden, but she went into the house, and Eve, with her colour returning slightly, held out one hand and pointed to the place at her side.

He did not take the seat, however, but, mastering his emotion, took the trembling hand between his and kissed it.

"You wished to see me?" he said.

"Yes," said Eve, in a whisper; "to thank you for your great—great kindness to me. They tell me I have been here eight weeks. I have been asking Mr. Purley whether I may not go home—to my aunt's—at least," she said, growing agitated, "somewhere—somewhere. I must not stay here."

He had come meaning to be calm, to command himself, knowing that she was delicate and weak; but at those words, and the visions they conjured up, the restraint of months was broken down, and, retaining her hand, he sat down beside her.

"Do you wish to go away, Eve?" he said, hoarsely, while his strong hand trembled like that he held.

"I cannot trespass on you longer," she said; and then in a weary, helpless manner, "but I meant to go away—far from here."

"Eve," he whispered, "may I tell you of something of which you have never dreamed? I meant to keep it yet for months, but your words drive me to speak, and at the risk of losing all I must.

"My child, I have known you now for months; I have watched you till I have felt that I knew even the thoughts of your gentle heart; and as I learned them, knowing what I did, life has been to me one long time of agony. Eve, I have loved you with all my heart—so well that I would not give you the pain of knowing it; glad to feel that I was your friend, whom you could trust and turn to in your trouble. Have I kept to that?"

"Yes, yes," she said, piteously.

"Have I ever broken from the position in which fate placed me, or been traitor to your trust? Have I ever shown you the deep and passionate love that was in my heart?"

"Never, never!" she moaned.

"No," he exclaimed; "I struggled and fought against it, even yielding to your wishes to perform a duty in which I felt that I was being my own executioner. But now you are free. You cannot wed this man!"

"No, no, no," she whispered, with a shudder.

"Then give me some little hope—however little. My darling, I will wait for years if you will but tell me—— You turn from me—am I mad in thinking that you might some day trust me with this little hand? You said you must go. Why—why leave me? Oh, Eve, darling! have I kept my secret so long for this?"

He was rising from his seat when her little hands went up to his, and he sank beside her, as they were placed upon his breast, and Eve's cheek went down upon them, and she nestled there.

"Is this a dream?" he exclaimed.

"One," she whispered, "that I have prayed might some day come true, but trembled, for I thought it was a sin."

"And you can love me?" he cried, drawing her closer and closer to him.

"At last," she murmured; "and when I thought I was alone in the wide, wide world. Love you!" she faltered, as she hid her face in his breast, "I have loved you from the first."

THE END.

Stirling, May 1885.

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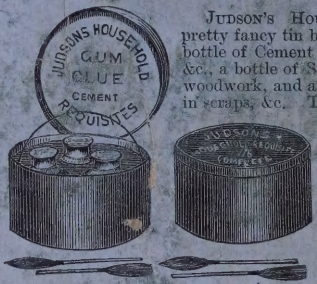

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